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Real dialogues on the  
evidences of Christianity

Susan V. Gallagher  
from her affectionate  
father  
J. V. Gallagher

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a letter or document, written on aged, yellowed paper. The text is arranged in several lines, with some words appearing to be "I have", "I am", and "I will". The ink is dark and the paper shows signs of wear and discoloration.











Engraved by J. S. Miller & Co.

Whilst we were seated there Mr Compton drove backwards and forwards on the greensward at the top.

✓  
REAL DIALOGUES

ON THE

# EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

FROM

“DEATH BED SCENES.”

BY A CLERGYMAN OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

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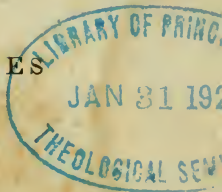
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## PREFACE BY THE AMERICAN EDITOR.

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THE following Dialogues upon the Evidences of Christianity, originally appeared in a much larger work, entitled "Death-Bed Scenes," which has had a considerable circulation in England. They are brought forward now in this form, because they present, in a very lucid and striking light, the argument for Christianity, and at the same time exhibit very clearly, the origin, the nature, and the tendencies of infidelity, in its various forms. Such a work, adapted thus to popular use, seems peculiarly suited to the exigencies of our country at the present time. It is well adapted, not only to convince the doubting, but to aid those already convinced in their conversations with others. It furnishes materials which the Pastor, the Sabbath School Teacher, and the Parent can employ to great advantage, in the instruction of those committed to their charge.

The author of the Dialogues asserts, that the scenes to which he introduces the reader he actually witnessed, and that the conversation recorded, actually took place. He says, the elevation of style, "may at times create the reasonable suspicion, that the whole recorded transaction is illusory. Indeed, this suspicion will, at any rate, sometimes arise, because the tone will be now and then above

the tone of usual conversation ; and because ideas and expressions will be ascribed to particular persons of which those persons will be thought incapable.

“ In point of fact, I am often in situations in which I am led to preach, rather than to speak ; I am compelled, that is, to speak continuously ; and then the magnitude of the subject would naturally raise any man’s language, under the same circumstances, to a loftier standard. With respect to others, I always preserve their ideas, and sometimes their very words, when there is any thing remarkable in them. But I have not been studious about it, and especially in the conversations related to happen between myself and people of low rank, I have discarded almost all their vulgarisms ; and also I have put their ideas into better shape and form, than they would have done for themselves. For I did not consider this to be a matter of any essential concern. Their meaning, and not their actual expressions, is all that is absolutely necessary to be known.”

We think that no one can read the following pages, without being interested and instructed. And at the present time, when such vigorous efforts are made to undermine the Christian faith, it seems peculiarly desirable that the evidences of revealed religion should be presented in every form which can attract the reader. We have found it necessary, in preparing these narratives for the American press, to omit many passages, which could only be interesting to English readers.



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REAL DIALOGUES

ON THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

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CHAPTER I.

THE REAL OBJECTION TO CHRISTIANITY.

HAVING observed a gentleman and lady at church two or three Sundays in succession, both morning and afternoon, sitting sometimes in one pew and sometimes in another, as the pew-openers were able to accommodate them, I inquired who they were, and found that they were the friends and visitors, of their brother, a gentleman who had a handsome villa in my parish. This information, and the appearance of the strangers themselves, together with the regularity of their attendance at church, suggested a hope to me, that through their means I might become acquainted with my wealthy parishioner, who had hitherto shunned all my advances, and kept aloof from any sort of acquaintance with me, from the consciousness of his own profligacy, and the total absence of all desire to change his mode of life and character.

Whilst I was deliberating upon this subject, the strangers, whose names were Mr. and Mrs. Harrison, came together to the Rectory; and, after the first salutations were over, Mr. Harrison having stated his wish to have some private conversation with me, I retired with him into the Shrubbery; and here he opened to me at large the lamentable case of his brother-in-law. He was a man of considerable fortune, who had held an office under the government. Unmarried himself, he had lived chiefly with unmarried men, and without any restraint as to manners and conversation. He condemned the Christian religion, because it condemned *him*, and because he knew nothing of it but the objections against it. To himself and his companions it was the theme of many a scoff, and since he had been in my parish he had never joined in any of its sacred rites. He could not, indeed, well have done so without a terrible disturbance of his opinions and practices. But he had no wish even to set an example of going to church; and thus, there being nothing to bring him there, and much to keep him away, it seemed likely, without some special interference of Providence, that he might have gone on uninterruptedly in the broad way to destruction.

However, a grievous sickness surprised him in the midst of his career, when he appeared to

have health, and strength, and length of days before him. In an instant he lost the use of all his lower limbs. He was stretched, as he supposed, on the bed of death. There was no creature about him that had any affection for him. He reflected, and he was humbled. He longed for the tender care and consolations of his sister; he adapted his family to her reception, and she came to him, together with her husband, with all the speed in their power. After their arrival he seemed to mend, and could move about on crutches. Nor had he turned a deaf ear to their gentle insinuations about religion; but, on the contrary, in consequence of what they had said to him of my preaching, he had expressed a desire of coming to church, if a pew could be found for him, suitable to his present circumstances. And this, therefore, was the inquiry which Mr. Harrison had now visited me to make.

Fortunately I was able to do them this service. There was a pew near one of the doors, on the ground-floor, the usual occupiers of which were absent. I made arrangements for having it assigned to them, and on the following Sunday morning, to my great satisfaction, I saw the sick man in it. His carriage had brought him to the church-gates, and from thence, with the help of a servant and his crutches, he had hobbled to his

seat. This he did two or three times, but the fatigue of it was so very severe, that, after such a trial, he was compelled to relinquish any further attempt. What had been the effect upon his mind, I could not precisely ascertain. It seemed, from his sister's account, that he had been struck with the appearance of a full church, and of so much earnestness and devotion in the congregation, and he had thought, perhaps, within himself, that there might be more truth in the matter than he was yet aware of; for why should so many people be mistaken, and he only and his companions in the right? The clergyman, indeed, had been educated for the purpose, and might be said to depend for his maintenance upon the upholding of the Christian religion; but this suspicion attached scarcely to any body else. However, mere custom, and habit, and early prepossession, would account for a great deal; they were so brought up, and now they continued in it without reasoning about it at all. In short, as Mrs. Harrison thought, her brother was at this time a confirmed sceptic, and she was extremely anxious that I should see him and talk to him.

I was quite ready; so I called, under the pretence of returning Mr. Harrison's visits, and also of asking the patient himself how he was, after his painful exertions to attend church. I was taken



at once into the room where he happened to be, and where Mr. and Mrs. Harrison were sitting with him. At first he appeared a little flurried, and my appearance seemed to be both unexpected and disagreeable to him; but by degrees we fell into conversation, and every token of unpleasant feeling entirely vanished.

Gradually, the conversation was turned to religious subjects, and Mr. Compton, for that was his name, commenced an attack upon some of the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel. But he found his ignorance exposed, and his attempts at ridicule foiled. At last he shrugged up his shoulders and exclaimed,

“Ah! Sir, the difficulties thicken upon us so fast, that I shall soon be lost in the multitude and the intricacy of them. I cannot presume, Dr. Warton, to occupy so much of your valuable time.”

This was a civil mode of wishing me good morning. But I was very unwilling that the conference should end exactly so, and determined to attempt at least to make an opening for a future conversation; so I said, “Oh! pray, Sir, do not spare me, by any means. My time is only valuable whilst it is thus and similarly employed. Besides, it may be well for yourself, in the present precarious state of your health, to have these religious difficulties cleared away, if it can be done;

and I do not know to whom the duty so properly belongs as to *me*."

He was silent, and seemed unable to determine what course to take. Upon which Mrs. Harrison, interposed, and said, "Dear brother, as Dr. War-ton is so kind, we will continue the discussion to-morrow, when I hope you will be a little stronger. I speak for myself too, for I have profited already, and I am sure I shall profit more by what I foresee is to come. It is impossible for any of us to be the worse for it."

This judicious speech settled his wavering thoughts; so he said hastily, but pleasantly, "Then we will give you chocolate to-morrow, Dr. War-ton, at one o'clock." Upon this I bowed, and departed.

The next day I went according to the appointment. He was on the sofa as before; but I learnt from his sister, that he had passed a bad night, and that it was with some difficulty they had got him up, and prepared him for my reception. However, as he was alarmed about himself, I expected to find him so much the more serious, and open to conviction. In fact, it was no light matter that we were about to contend for, but life or death; whether the remnant and the close of his mortal existence should be cheered or not by the bright prospects of the Christian religion.

When we were comfortably seated, and some common things had been said, observing him very much depressed, I endeavored at once to turn his thoughts towards religion, by remarking, what a vast advantage we had over the very wisest of ancient times, in regard to the means of supporting pain and evil with patience and resignation. In their beautiful works which have come down to us, they talk perpetually of a fate which none can control, and of the folly of complaining where there is no remedy. With no better reasons than these, the Stoic could arm himself with triple steel, impenetrable by any assault; and buffet the waves of adversity, without sinking under them. How much rather, then, must the Christian be firmly upheld, who sees, in every thing that befalls him, the hand of a wise and merciful Providence outstretched over him; and which disciplines him for a better and more durable existence hereafter.

“Certainly,” the sick man said, “this is more comfortable and animating. The other is cold and gloomy enough. What a pity that the Christian account of things cannot be more satisfactorily made out, so as to leave no shadow of doubt in the mind!”

“Then,” I said, “if the thing were made out to an incontrovertible certainty, there would be no room for faith at all, which is ordained, however,

to be the constant exercise and trial of the Christian. But, with respect to the proof which you call unsatisfactory, wherein does it fail? If it be not actual demonstration, what matter of fact ever had greater evidence?"

"A book which relates extraordinary things cannot be admitted without extraordinary proof," he said.

"Certainly," I rejoined, "the book records miracles, and miracles perhaps require more, or greater, evidence than other facts; yet it can only be evidence of the same kind as is necessary to establish those other facts. Of course, we must have in all cases of facts the testimony of witnesses. But the criterion to try the credit of witnesses is this. It is directly as their knowledge of the facts which they relate and the impossibility of their being deceived themselves; and inversely as their interest, or wish to deceive *us*; so that if they are perfectly acquainted with the facts, and can have no probable wish or interest to deceive, their credit is complete. This was the case with the writers of the New Testament; they could not by any means be deceived themselves, or ignorant of the fact of miracles being performed, especially as they themselves performed them every day; and men, who sacrificed their lives, rather than forbear to affirm what they affirmed,

could have no conceivable worldly interest at least in view, which might create a wish in them to deceive the rest of mankind. Thus the matter stands simply. Then comes the collateral evidence of the truth of the miracles, which seems to have a strength about it incapable of being shaken ; I mean the rapid propagation of Christianity in the world, which cannot be accounted for, under all the circumstances, without miracles."

"Yes," he said, "but the evidence against miracles is stronger than any evidence can possibly be in their favor. God has established certain laws to regulate the course of nature ; and that he should change or suspend his own laws is so improbable as to exceed credulity. In short, no evidence can prove such a thing. Let your evidence come as near as you please to demonstration itself, yet I consider it to be a certainty, on the other side, that God never has, and never will, alter those laws. Indeed such a proceeding would disturb all our knowledge of nature, and overturn the conclusions of all our experience." "If miracles were performed daily, or very often," I replied, "the effect might be as you describe ; but it would be too much to say, that a certain number of miracles having been performed in certain parts of the world, about 1800 years ago, therefore the knowledge and experience of the

whole world, and of all subsequent ages, must be overturned by it. The very utmost that could be imagined is this; that persons seeing a vast number of miracles continually, might begin to doubt what was nature and what was not. But, in truth, only the very weakest persons could be deceived for a moment. If we were now to see a man cure twenty or a hundred people in one day, of the most dreadful diseases, by merely touching them, would that at all disturb our ideas with respect to the processes of medicine?"

Here I paused; but Mr. Compton not speaking, I continued thus: "Besides, it is to be taken into the account, that the person performing the miracles has an errand to deliver from God; and also that he performs the miracles expressly to prove his divine commission. Miracles are not to be supposed to be performed at random, and we know not why; but immediately upon seeing a miracle, and our attention together with our astonishment being aroused by it, we shall naturally look to the doer, to hear what he will also say to us; and if what he says be worthy of God, we shall believe it to come from God, and that the miracle is the work of divine power."

"Do you allow then," he inquired eagerly, "that real miracles may be performed by any other than a divine power?"



“ *That* is a question which I cannot settle,” I said. “But to argue safely we must allow it. A miracle is something out of the common course of things, and beyond the power of man; and what beings there may be between man and God, capable of performing miracles, it is impossible for us to conjecture. We know, however, from Scripture, of a whole class of beings superior in power to man and hostile to man, who probably can perform miracles. Scripture itself seems to insinuate that they can; and moreover, that we may be deceived by their miracles, whether false or true. For this reason, therefore, when we see what we suppose to be a miracle, we must not be carried away by our astonishment, but attend to what the doer says. If the doer should tell us to worship the devil, we detect the miracle immediately, whether a real or a pretended one, to have the devil for its author; but if the doctrine taught be for our improvement and happiness, we hail the messenger of God.”

Here Mr. Compton interrupted me, by saying with a triumphant air, “I have often heard, Sir, that the doctrines of the gospel are proved by the miracles, and now you tell me that the miracles are proved by the doctrines. Is not this what they call arguing in a circle, which never brings us to any just conclusion? The doctrines depend

upon the miracles, and the miracles upon the doctrines, what end is there of this? And what supports them both? Or is not this the same as the world and the tortoise? The tortoise supports the world, but what supports the tortoise? Nothing." Thus he turned the argument about into different shapes, as if he never would be tired of it; and, no doubt, if he had been surrounded by his gay infidel companions, (but the house of sickness was not the place for *them*,) I should have been laughed to scorn. I cast a glance upon Mr. and Mrs. Harrison; they had put down their chocolate, and were evidently uneasy; they probably disliked their brother's tone, but I fancied, besides, they were not masters of the question, and thence their uneasiness.

I began my reply with saying, "Many persons, have been deceived by that view, and it does at first sight seem a perplexing difficulty, but it is soon unravelled. Divide doctrines into their two species, and the thing is done. Let me ask you, does not the gospel contain *moral rules*, agreeable to our reason, and discoverable by it, as well as *theological points*, some of which are beyond our reason, and all of them purely matters of revelation?"

He hesitated; so I said, "Take an example: 'Do unto others as you would wish that they



should do unto *you*.' Is not this maxim to be found in the gospel?"

He assented.

"Did we stand in need of a revelation to make this known to us?"

"No," he replied.

"Is it not agreeable to our reason?"

He allowed it.

"Is it not also discoverable by our reason, and the light of nature?"

"To be sure it is," he answered; "and it had been discovered long before the gospel mentioned it?"

"Very well then," I said, "we will call if you please, all doctrines of this kind moral precepts; or, for the sake of brevity, precepts simply."

"As you will," he replied.

"Now," I said, "take an example of another sort of doctrine. 'I and my Father are one.' This is in the gospel, is it not?"

He granted it.

"Could we have known it without revelation?"

"No, certainly," he answered.

"Is it agreeable to our reason, or beyond it?"

"Beyond it," he replied, "most unquestionably."

"Now then," I said, "for all the doctrines of this kind, which are very numerous, let us reserve

the term doctrines, and appropriate it to *them* alone. Have you any objection?"

"None whatever," he answered.

"So then," I said, "we have now agreed to denominate all the great propositions of Scripture by the two titles of precepts and doctrines, and the difference between them is manifested."

"It is quite so," he replied.

"Observe then," I said. "When it is asserted, that the doctrines are proved by the miracles, they mean by doctrines what we have this instant agreed to call doctrines; namely, the pure theological dogmata, which are beyond our reason, and discoverable only by revelation; and it is perfectly plain, that, unless the teacher of these doctrines performed miracles, they could not be known to be of divine origin. On the other hand, when it is asserted that the miracles are proved by the doctrines, by doctrines are meant precepts; namely, those excellent moral rules for the government of human life which our reason is capable of discovering, which human reason had partly discovered, and which the most exalted reason the most approves. Why these precepts are necessary to prove the miracles to be divine, arises from the supposition that miracles, true or false, but such as to deceive, may be performed by wicked beings. For if any thing contradictory to these precepts be

taught by the doer of the miracles, the miracles are detected at once. As our Savior said, 'the tree is known by its fruits;' and again, 'if Satan be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?' Tell me then what the precepts are, and I will tell you what the doer of the miracle is. Upon the whole, therefore, you see, there is no vicious circle, as you imagined. This, in fact, is the order in which the transaction may be supposed to proceed. An extraordinary person appears in the world, in the most learned and enlightened age of it; uneducated himself, he preaches a system of ethics, so pure, so sublime, so calculated to promote the welfare and happiness of individuals, of families, and of nations, that all the accumulated reason of all mankind in all ages had not attained to any thing equal; the same person performs mighty miracles. What must we think of him?"

"Why, Sir," exclaimed Mr. Harrison with warmth, "that God is with him of a truth."

"Undoubtedly," I said: "for such a system overturns the devil's kingdom, and therefore the devil could not work the miracles to establish that system. But mark the sequel. This extraordinary personage, having excited your admiration, and won your love, by the beauty and perfection of his heavenly precepts; and by his works, having extorted from you the willing confession that

his authority is divine, you are now ripe for his doctrines; you are now prepared to admit what you could only admit on divine authority: such a teacher cannot lie; whatever he says is truth itself, and issues from the fountain of truth: though your reason, so delighted and satisfied before, may now be perplexed and dazzled, and unable to cope with the mighty difficulties of the things revealed; yet you must submit your reluctant faculties, you must bow in humble silence, or you must break out into prayer, and say, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

Here I paused, and none of them interrupted the silence. Mr. and Mrs. Harrison had their eyes fixed on Mr. Compton, and seemed to expect that he should declare his sentiments; but he uttered not a word. He appeared to be wrapt in thoughts which were not easy to him. It might be, that he was disturbed by the breaking up of his position, and by the consequent approximation towards the necessity of becoming a Christian. But he was not a penitent, nor weaned yet from the vices of the world; so that to adopt Christianity was an intolerable idea. He feared it, and, therefore, he did not yet desire it.

At length, having had time to reflect, I thought it better to attempt to fill up the parts of the argument, than to press him for an opinion upon it in

his present state: I resumed my discourse, therefore, nearly as follows:

“ We have passed on so rapidly, that we have left several important things behinds us. The excellency of the things taught decides the character of the miracles, as we have already shown; but then there is a reaction of the miracles upon the things taught, and we now perceive them to be directly sanctioned by the great God of heaven, and we acknowledge, of course, that they must be implicitly obeyed. Under any circumstances, the gospel-precepts would be pronounced to be worthy of God; but, taking them in the abstract, we could not know whether they came immediately from him. Being things discoverable by human reason, we could not tell whether they might not have been so discovered, whatever might be their superior excellence, and the humbleness of their authors; and, therefore, we could not assign to them more than the highest human authority; but, the preachers of them performing miracles, at once the authority becomes divine. For a test of the miracles, it is enough that they are excellent, but to give them complete authority over us, it is necessary to show that their origin is divine; and this is done by the miracles.

“ Then again, with respect to the doctrines, at least a great portion of them, there is a reaction

there also. Take this as an example of what I mean :—‘ God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ This is one of the doctrines which we could never have known but by revelation, and even when revealed to us, we understand very little more than the simple proposition. But this is by no means a dry, speculative, unoperative proposition ; and what is most striking about it, is the benevolence of it, which surpasses all human understanding. We can only receive it, indeed, and believe it altogether, on the authority of the miracles ; but the clear, benevolent object of it may be taken as a primary test of the miracles themselves. What a picture have we here of God’s immense goodness and mercy towards a fallen part of his creation, that he spared his own Son from his bosom to redeem and save it ! How gracious, unspeakably gracious, to make faith and trust in that Savior the condition of rescuing us from eternal death, and restoring us to that everlasting life, which we had forfeited and lost. We are absorbed in wonder and gratitude, and are disposed to exclaim at once, this is divine ; this proves the miracles to be of God.

“ Now, then, put the whole together. A man in outward appearance preaches most excellent



precepts and most benevolent doctrines; and he performs miracles, which, in consequence, we pronounce divine. But, the preacher's divine commission being now established, we revert to the same precepts and doctrines, and pronounce *them* divine also. This is the short summation of the argument; pray tell me, now sir, whether, in your judgment of it, there lies any objection to it. Is the reasoning liable to the charge of being in a circle, or paralogistic? I throw myself upon your candor and ingenuousness for your honest opinion."

"Why, then, Dr. Warton," he said, "as you press me so closely, I must confess, that you have put this matter in a light which is new to me, and, perhaps, the true one, if miracles were really performed. But all this is outstripping the main question. You assume those miracles throughout; whereas I denied in the very beginning that any evidence could prove a miracle. Without doubt, if miracles had been really performed, then they might have been applied to the purposes which you mention, of showing that certain precepts had God's authority, and that certain doctrines were true doctrines, and to be believed as such."

"It is true," I said, "we have not attacked that question directly; but we have acted as pioneers, and have cleared away the approaches to it. A miracle, which is a departure from the established

course of God's government, can only be justified, even according to my notions, by a most worthy and an extraordinary occasion ; such as an errand from God to mankind would be. I ask you, could any errand be known to be from God without a miracle accompanying it ?”

“ Yes,” he answered, “ the errand itself might show it.”

“ Then,” I said, “ if any errand could show it, the Christian religion, *à fortiori*, would show it ; for never was so noble and excellent an errand as that. But we have settled already, that the Christian precepts, excellent and noble as they may be, could not show it, because it is of their essence to be discoverable by human reason ; and certainly the doctrines could not show it ; because, although excellent and noble too, like the precepts, and well worthy of coming from God, and being such as can only come by revelation, yet still, the result of experience decides the matter incontestably, that it is difficult to persuade multitudes of mankind to receive them as divine, even with the help of miracles ; so much are many of them above and beyond our reason. In fact, I believe it is to get rid of these doctrines, that persons would get rid of the miracles ; which is a tacit confession that only miracles could prove them.”

“ Now how is any message to be shown to be



from God? When God wished to send a message to the Jews by Moses, that illustrious messenger very properly demanded a miraculous power for his credential; for he argued well, that without such a credential, the Jews would only disregard, or ridicule his pretensions, however gracious and honorable for them the message itself might be. Again, when God sent a message to Gideon, to order him to do something, for which he thought himself unqualified by his want of rank and ability, he would not be satisfied, that the message really came from God, until he saw a miracle. And this agrees with the common sense of mankind. I ask you, therefore, once more, to point out, if you can, any other method of discriminating God's ambassador than by a miracle."

Mr. Compton appearing to be reluctant to commit himself, Mr. Harrison answered for him, that there was no other way imaginable; and that it was all in vain to talk, or think of any expedient, with the view of getting rid of miracles. "The case," he said, "is too manifest to admit of debate, or doubt."

Mr. Compton here suggested what was extremely absurd for a man of his principles; namely, that the messenger might be described beforehand, and, consequently, known when he came, by his correspondence to the description.

"This previous description would be a prophecy, would it not?" I asked.

"It certainly would," he replied.

"Then you allow," I asked again, "do you, Sir, such things as prophecies?"

"No indeed," he exclaimed, aware of the net in which he had incautiously entangled himself, "I allow nothing. I must have every thing proved legitimately. I have only stated a supposition now for the sake of discussing it."

This discouraged me; but I proceeded to inquire, whether he considered a prophecy to be according to the course of nature, or within the sphere of human ability.

"No," he answered, "I do not. For though some men have a wonderful talent of foreseeing events at a distance, yet it can never be reckoned, generally, a human talent."

"Then a prophecy," I said, "is a species of miracle, is it not?"

"Why, to be sure," he replied, "you may call it so, if you please."

"Oh!" I rejoined, "it matters not what you or I may be pleased to call it. A prophecy is a real miracle, in the true sense of the term; it is out of the course of nature, and the power of man. And more especially to prefigure a person, who is to appear at a remote period, so exactly, as that he

may be known at once when he does appear, seems to be one of the greatest of miracles. We, therefore, still want a criterion."

"Well," said he, "you have allowed, Dr. War-ton, that errands and miracles go both together; and that either of them without the other is not credible, or not supposable. Take away the errand, therefore, and the miracle falls to the ground of itself, being left without any support. And, I am sure, it appears to *me* one of the most unlikely things in the world, that God should trouble himself, or condescend so far, as to send any messages to us. We are not of consequence enough in the creation. This earth is but a molehill, and *we* ants upon it, in comparison with the infinite extent of God's whole dominion."

Thus, then, after a long conflict, a new battle was to be fought, which might last equally long, and terminate with equal apparent success. But it behoved me not to shrink; so, after a short pause:—"Your account of man, at all events," I said, "is very different from the scriptural account. Judge, when you have heard the latter, which is the noblest, and the most accurate, and the most desirable to embrace. When the great Creator had finished the rest of his works, wanting another creature to rule them all, and, as their Priest, to adore him in their name, he said, 'Let us make

man in our own image after our likeness.' In the creation of other things, all is done with the tone of command, or with a mere volition. 'Let there be light; let there be a firmament; let the earth bring forth so and so.' But when man is to be made—a creature who is to be endued with reason and intelligence—the very image of the Maker,—he used an expression which indicates deliberation and counsel; of whom, as well as of himself, man was to be both the workmanship and the resemblance. By the mode, too, in which the body is related to have been formed, there is a striking mark of the pre-eminence of man. To mould the human body, the divine workman, it should seem, takes the clay himself. He applies, we are told, his own hands to the senseless matter; and there grows up under them a form of exquisite, surpassing beauty; a wonderful specimen of what omniscience can plan, and omnipotence execute. But the production of the soul is still more astonishing; he derives it not from the most subtil material substances—he breathes it from on high; the soul is a particle of his own spiritual essence—a spark of his own ethereal flame, unextinguishable for ever. It is the soul, therefore, which reflects chiefly the bright image of the Maker—immaterial, immortal—possessing within herself the faculty of self-agency; gifted

with the noble powers of thinking, of reasoning, of willing; the subject of moral responsibility—capable of righteousness and holiness in this transient world, and of aspiring beyond it to a state of everlasting permanency and perfection in her native heavens. All the matter in all the millions of suns and tens of millions of worlds which revolve about them—whatever beauty, whatever magnificence God has conferred upon it, is not equal to one single particle of mind. Such is the soul,—and thus were soul and body created; and all the subsequent accounts of Scripture show, that God has never withdrawn his care from any of the works of his own hands; that he superintends them by a vigilant, incessant providence; that every soul of man, more especially, is infinitely precious in his sight; and that his will is, that not one of them should perish. Hence, therefore, message after message to mankind—messages of love, of instruction, of warnings, of threatenings, of promises, of pardon, of reconciliation, of grace here, of glory hereafter. Thus speaks the Bible; and does not every heart beat responsive to this gladsome history? Where is the man who, so far from being refreshed and renovated, in his pilgrimage through life, by drinking deeply of the streams of this divine knowledge, would rather plunge blindfold into the dark, disconsolate system

of conflicting atoms—of a God, too inert and indolent, too fond of ease and repose, too much wrapt up in the silent, abstracted contemplation of himself and his own essence and pleasures, to create worlds, or to govern them? How different the God of the Bible, by whom every hair of our heads is numbered, and without whose knowledge and will, not a sparrow falleth to the ground? But, it must disturb him, you think—this omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent Being—it must disturb him, and distract him, and overwhelm him, to bear so vast a load—to regulate so prodigious a multiplicity of things. Have you considered how much those infinite perfections infer? They confute the narrow notion of a God faint and weary with the burden of affairs. You are finite, and your works are in the proportion of finite to finite; but in the works of God the proportion is of infinite to infinite. Yes, you may still say, but it is all below his dignity. Not so thought the sublimest genius amongst men, who sung of God after another sort. ‘He giveth food to the young ravens which cry; he openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness.’ There is an argument, however, which is short, and irresistible. If it was not below his dignity to create, it is not below it to preserve and govern his creation.”



Thus I went on, and could have gone on for ever, borne along by the prolific magnificence of the topic; but still more, by a feeling of indignation, that men, who are taught, and encouraged, and inwardly urged to look so high, should voluntarily debase themselves and their condition so low, as if they would be prone and grovelling, like the brute. After I had paused, my mind still swelled with the idea; and a minute or two elapsed, before I was aware that nobody was preparing to answer me. Mr. and Mrs. Harrison told me in private, afterwards, that they were silent, lest they might weaken what I had said. Mr. Compton I could not fathom. He was capable, indeed, of admiring lofty notions, because of his liberal education; and I fancied, once or twice, that I saw a beam of light irradiating his care-worn countenance, and I almost expected him to exclaim, I yield; but sin yet weighed him down; and, as he might fear, that, if the gospel were true, its punishments and not its rewards awaited him, he, perhaps in his secret thoughts, preferred annihilation.

However, at length, to bring him to something more decisive, I said, "Your objection as to the trouble and condescension of the Deity in favor of man, and your ideas of the insignificance of man himself, are, I trust, materially weakened, if



not entirely removed. It is true my answer has been derived chiefly from Scripture, but at all events it must be allowed, with respect to man, that on this globe there is no other creature in any way to be compared with him, or so worthy of the care of Providence. It must be allowed, moreover, that this globe itself is an important constituent portion of one great solar system, which embraces many millions of miles in the regions of space; and that, if there were thousands or millions of such systems, or much larger ones, yet it is quite incredible that any one of them should be neglected by its Supreme Maker: when in the construction, and movements, and all the circumstances of them there is displayed, without doubt, as in ours, an astonishing skill of mechanics and geometry; striking marks, innumerable, of contrivance and design, and of final causes; and a beauty, magnificence, order, and harmony of the parts, and of the whole, which bespeak the divine workman. If one such system were blotted at once out of the Universe, we might fancy that it would not be missed, and that no gap would be visible in the creation. But if one might be blotted out in this manner, and God not regard the loss, as being insignificant when compared with the remainder, then another and another may be blotted out with the same result; and I do

not see where this will end, but in proving too much: namely, that God cares for none of these many systems, and not merely that he does not care for one or two out of the many. But, I presume, you will not go this length; and therefore we must of necessity conclude that our own solar system is under his immediate, superintending providence, and, consequently, every world also which is a part of that system—and, above all, what is most valuable in each world. And here, as we have said, in this planet of ours, man is the most valuable creature, for whose habitation and use, in fact, the planet itself was apparently made. Or do you think that God has placed more valuable creatures than men in the other planets, towards whom he exercises a due and constant regard; and that this earth, although inhabited and possessed by so excellent a creature as man must be confessed to be, is still but a sort of moon to those other planets, or a mere counterpoise, to regulate their velocities, and to keep them in their appointed stations, and at their proper distances from the sun, and from each other?"

The absurdity of this supposition drew forth from my antagonist the only observation which he had hazarded for a long time. Amongst his own set, where there was no restraint, no necessity for deliberation, no fear of being convicted of

ignorance, he was quick, I believe, in rapartee, and by a smart sally of wit he would turn the laugh upon an opponent; but such a talent was useless here. He had tried it indeed, and it had failed. The respect which even the profligate feel for the sacredness of the clergyman's character; the charitable and wholly disinterested purpose for which I came to him; the gravity and solemnity of my manner at particular moments; the superior information which I possessed upon the subjects of our discussion; all these together produced a sort of awe and fear in him, lest he should either offend *me* or expose himself. He was therefore becoming very cautious, and in consequence he was often entirely mute. Here, however, he interposed, and allowed, that it would be a sad clumsy contrivance to make one world for the sake of lightening and balancing other worlds. To do so would be somewhat similar to what they tell us of the spleen in the human body, that it was only put there to pack up the space tight and clever. "But after all," he said, "I do not see why we may not consider the divine architect just the same as any human architect. The watchmaker, for instance, constructs a watch with wonderful skill and pains, and delivers it out of his hands when finished, and troubles himself no more about it. What is a world to God but as a watch to a watchmaker?"

"What object," I inquired, "has the watch-maker in view when he makes a watch?"

"To maintain himself, I have no doubt," was his answer.

"Most likely," I said, "and therefore of course he does not care what becomes of it, when he has exchanged it for the things which he wants; for clothing, food, and lodging. Has God any wants of this kind, or of any other kind?"

"None whatever," he replied; "it would be absurd to think so."

"It would indeed," I said. "But still he must have some object in making worlds, must he not? Does he make them, do you suppose, as children blow soap bubbles, to try their own dexterity; to gaze at them mounting into the air; to admire, for an instant, the pretty colors which they reflect, and then to laugh and exult when they burst and disappear?"

"I allow," he answered, "that he must have some object, and a worthier object than this; but what it may be I cannot conjecture."

"I will tell you then," I said. "It is his desire of exercising his great attributes for the purpose of communicating pleasure and happiness. If he were the only being, as he is the greatest, he would still be infinitely happy in himself. But this solitary grandeur and self-sufficiency

limit, or even supersede, the very energies which may well be supposed to constitute his happiness. Simply to be—wonderful as is the mode of his existence; necessary, that is, and underived, from all eternity—simply to be, even after this unspeakable mode, can never be all. Infinite goodness *must* and *will* diffuse itself around through infinite space; infinite wisdom will never cease to plan, nor infinite power to create, recipients of infinite love. Thus worlds arise, by the eternal fiat, replenished with creatures capable of their suitable enjoyments, and some amongst the rest capable also of a moral government; and it is evident that in the government of these chiefly will the great glory of so incomparable a being be, first and last, most illustriously displayed. Every flower that sips the dew of heaven seems to lift up its head to heaven in token of gratitude and praise; every living creature that creeps upon the earth, or wings the air, or swims through the world of waters, by their sportive joy attest the sense of their Creator's bounty. But this is mere poetry, you will say; it is the rational creature only who is able to give an actual utterance to the sentiments of the whole creation; he alone, in this vast temple of the universe, can actually worship the God of it; he alone, indeed, has faculties, by which he may ascend to the knowledge of him, appreciate his

manifold works of mercy, and above all, by obedience to his will, of his own free choice, and by no compulsory law of his nature, glorify him with his proper glory. But now, observe, we are returned to the point from which we set out. The whole of the divine will we can only ascertain by a revelation; and as God's chief glory arises from our conformity to that will, a revelation is *à priori* a most probable event, and consequently miracles are probable also, by which alone the revelation can be proved. But this may be put in a stronger light. Suppose the rational creature, by the abuse of his noble but dangerous privilege of free will, to have transgressed the boundaries originally assigned to him, and thus to have fallen under the just displeasure of his Maker—how is he to recover his lost estate? How is he to know, indeed, whether it be recoverable or not? O what a worthy cause have we here for a revelation of love and mercy, and therefore for miracles to attest its truth, to raise the drooping spirit of the wretched, fallen being, and to assure him of his reconciliation to his God!"

As the time had now arrived when it was necessary for me to leave my sick friend, I rose from my seat and said, "I shall be happy, Mr. Compton, to see you again. A great deal has passed between us, in this hasty discussion, which



deserves, and may require, maturer reflection. Think it over, I earnestly entreat you, in the calm solitude of your own breast. Trace out the several steps of the argument through which we have travelled, and examine the ground on which we have trodden. If you discover a false step, or what may appear to *you* to be so, point it out to me when we next meet, and we will re-examine it together." Then, having said this, before they were well aware, and with a view to escape the trouble and delay of ceremony, I took up my hat and cane, and was out of the room in a moment. I was really in a hurry; but I feel sometimes after conversations of this kind, as when I descend from the pulpit, that the small talk of common life is a sad falling off, and an intolerable frivolity.

My going away, however, so hastily, procured me a visit the next day from Mr. and Mrs. Harrison, who complimented me upon my eloquence, as they were pleased to call it, and upon the irresistible force of argument with which I had maintained the claims of revelation; and they told me, that they did not know how to thank me sufficiently for the great exertions which I had made to convince him, and for the cool temper and unwearied patience with which I had followed up the shifting current of the discussion, and had met



him perpetually on his own new-chosen ground. But, what was of more consequence, they informed me, that they were commissioned by Mr. Compton himself to apologize to me for any apparent want of civility in his conduct towards me, and to charge it upon the deplorable state of his health, which often tormented his body with pain, and disturbed his mind with care. To this they added, that, if the following day was fine, he intended to try a longer airing than usual, and invited me to accompany him, with the express view of renewing the conversation.

“But what hope?” I inquired eagerly. “This invitation seems a favorable omen; it bespeaks a willingness to hear, at least, which God perchance may bless. Has any progress meanwhile been made?”

“Believe me, Sir,” said Mrs. Harrison, “this itself is no little progress; but much more, I trust, has been done. I was left alone with my brother when you went from us yesterday, Mr. Harrison having followed you, though without overtaking you, to the door. After a moment’s pause, ‘This Dr. Warton,’ he exclaimed suddenly, ‘is an expert man at his weapons, and pins me down so tightly that I cannot get loose. I shall be frightened when he begins those plausible questions again, which I no sooner answered, than I found myself

caught, and condemned out of my own mouth. But he was equally terrible to me when he spread his sails, and took a wider range; for though I had only to listen, and might have listened with delight if I had been an unconcerned auditor, yet feeling myself to be a principal character in the drama, and one very deeply interested, and represented, too, throughout, in a degraded light, and borne down by a torrent, these cushions, I assure you, were never so uneasy to me before. He had greatly the advantage over me, my dear Charlotte, had he not?' 'Yes, indeed, brother,' I answered, 'he had certainly; but it was no discredit to your talents, for in my opinion the cause which you endeavor to maintain cannot be maintained by any talents. It is too unworthy both of God and of man.' 'Well, Charlotte, leave me till dinner-time to myself. I will for once at least attend to his advice, and retrace the course of the argument, that I may see whether I granted any thing which I ought to have denied, and the concession of which paved way for his apparent victory.' 'Do, my dear brother,' I replied, 'and be sure to take care that you are impartial, and search for truth—for truth alone, and not for the triumph of any set of opinions.' The remainder of my story is short. He summoned me to his bed-chamber this morning, and, after saying that he had been

thinking deeply and incessantly upon all the topics that arose in the discussion between himself and you, he dictated the message which I have just delivered."

"Very well," I said, "I shall be at his service, and may God prosper the event." In this prayer they joined fervently, and so quitted the rectory.

The next morning was propitious to the plan of the extended drive, though not warm enough to admit of the carriage been thrown open. If this, indeed, had been done, we might have enjoyed the prospects better, but I do not see exactly how we could have conversed with due freedom, (especially as, when heated, I spoke sometimes in an elevated key,) without making the coachman and footman a party in the discussion. Mrs. Harrison alone was with us; for, Mr. Compton being so placed as to occupy one side of the carriage himself, there was room for two only on the other side, and it was his particular wish to have his sister with him. He considered his health upon the whole a little improved, and with that idea his spirits had risen in proportion; but I understood it to be the opinion of the medical men that his recovery was not to be expected; that he might linger for two or three months, or that his death might be soon and sudden. He had not the most distant notion himself that there was a limit fixed

for him, so very short at the longest; when his disorder was violent, he was immediately depressed and thought he should die, but a better night, and a little freedom from pain, removed the troublesome impression, and revived the hopes of life.

Upon being clear of the houses and the pavement, when the usual things, about his health, the weather, and the intended ride, had been said, Mr. Compton remarked, that "the conclusion, at which we appeared, in our late discussion, to have arrived, depended upon a premise rather assumed than established. Miracles pre-supposed an errand from God to man; but the object of a divine errand must be to declare the divine will. Now, if the divine will be discoverable by man himself, by a due use of his own reason, there will be no necessity of a special errand." "No," I said; "but you must recollect, that precepts only, and not doctrines, are within the scope of human discovery. Granting, therefore, that all the most excellent precepts, as we have them in the gospel, were actually discovered, and sufficiently made known to mankind, and universally acknowledged for the rule of life, all which is necessary besides the discovery, yet how are we to know the doctrines, which are not so discoverable, and which moreover it may be highly expedient or even necessary for us to know? In fact, these doctrines, we may well

imagine, are the very occasion of God's errand. Do you think that God would send a message to us, and disturb the course of nature to bear witness to it, merely to tell us what we know, or might have known already?"

Here I paused for an answer, but Mr. Compton declined to give any, and said, "I am much obliged to you, Dr. Warton, for talking with me; but I must request of you not to pursue that system of questions upon questions. My health is not equal to the fatigue and anxiety of it; and I find myself sometimes entrapped by it unawares into concessions, of which I afterwards repent. I like best to hear you speak continuously, and to be enabled to view the whole argument at once."

"Well," I replied, "I will cheerfully pursue that course, if you wish it, but I must once trouble you so far as to ask you, whether truth be not the great object of our investigation, and such truth as is of unspeakable moment?"

"It is certainly," he answered.

"And does not every argument," I asked again, "consist of three propositions at least, when fully drawn out; namely, the two premises and the conclusion?" He allowed it.

"If, then," I said, "I put the first premise to you in the form of a question, and you consent to it with your own mouth, and the second premise also be

put and granted in a similar manner, can you have a more compendious or a more decisive and indisputable mode of arriving at self conviction with respect to the conclusion, which is, perhaps, the very truth after which we are searching, and which we agree in considering of extreme importance?"

"It may be the shortest mode," he replied, "and when a man has allowed the premises, he cannot easily, or with a good face, dispute the legitimate conclusion; but it would be more agreeable to me to know the whole journey which it is proposed to me to travel, before I take a single step. In short, I would not willingly take a single step, without knowing where it would place me, and what would be the second and the third step, and, above all, the last. As I said before, any other mode is too fatiguing and too anxious for me."

"Which is easiest," I inquired, "to consider one insulated, unconnected proposition, or a chain of propositions consisting of many links?" He hesitated; but he was compelled to confess, that the single proposition was the easiest to consider.

"Again," I inquired, "as to the man who is in search of truth, is he alarmed about any of the steps which may conduct him towards it, being so excellent a thing, and the very thing which he wants to find?"



He was touched to the quick, and instead of answering, he exclaimed, "Oh, Dr. Warton, you are doing at this moment what I particularly deprecated."

"Yes, yes," I said, smiling; "these preliminaries must needs be settled in this very manner, and then we may afterwards consider, whether the same or any other mode shall be adopted, in the great debate which is to follow. Suppose, therefore, for a moment, a person having a monstrous unaccountable antipathy to the mathematical truth, respecting the two lines, that continually approach and never meet; what would be his conduct? When any simpler proposition, in the road to the more difficult one, which he holds in abhorrence, was proposed to him, would he not fatigue and rack his brain with thinking how that simpler proposition might bear upon the other, and torment himself with anxiety, lest, by allowing it, he might imperceptibly be committed to the allowing of the abominable one? Whereas, if he were simply a learner of mathematical truths, without any prejudice against any particular proposition, he would follow, not only fearlessly, but also joyfully, wherever he might be led, from truth to truth, and refreshed and recruited by every new discovery. Is not this so?"

It was impossible for him to deny it.



“Much more, then,” I said, “will it be so in morals and religion, which affect every man’s present conduct and future prospects. If the inquirer is prejudiced against the conclusion, and thinks he has any interest in evading it, he will, of course, fatigue himself with anxiety about every proposition which may bring him a step nearer to it; but if not, he will never consider previously where any proposition, if accepted, may eventually lead him, nor will he be anxious about it; all that sort of fatigue and anxiety he will entirely escape; he will consider only whether the proposition be true, and he will act accordingly.”

Here I paused. Mr. Compton was conscience-stricken and speechless. He was too proud to confess or to deny his feelings; but if he had denied them, his countenance would have convicted him of a falsehood; to bring him to confess them seemed to *me* to be of the most essential consequence. So, turning to Mrs. Harrison, I said, “Join with me, my good Madam, in pressing Mr. Compton to lay open his whole bosom to us. We are precisely the persons to whom it would be most natural, most proper, and most safe to do it. You are his sister, whom, after a long estrangement, he has recalled to his affection; and he is assured of your tender care and solicitude for him. He cannot fear to entrust any thing to *you*. I am

his spiritual guardian, appointed by the laws of his country and the discipline of our holy church, to entreat, to advise, to admonish him, for his present and eternal welfare. But I cannot perform this office with due effect, with so many impediments in my way, which, perhaps, I might remove at once, if I knew his heart."

Mrs. Harrison was deeply affected, and could only weep. But her tears, perhaps, availed her more than any words could have done. Her brother was evidently moved, and took her by the hand, and tried to soothe her; but still no advance was yet made towards the purpose which I had in view. I resumed, therefore, and said, looking at Mr. Compton,

"If the Christian religion be true, we *must* believe it all events; and should there be any thing unrepented of in our past life, which makes us dread it and cavil against it, *that* will not alter the fact or the consequence of its truth; nor would it profit us to die unconvinced; the fact and the consequence will remain the same. If, on the other hand, the Christian religion be false, which, however, in the face of so much evidence, can only be supposed for the sake of argument; yet what shall we have lost by embracing and obeying it? We shall have lived according to the best law of our nature, and we shall die with the most agreeable

hopes; nor will the disappointment of those hopes occasion us a moment's pain—for we shall wake no more to be conscious of it."

Upon this, Mr. Compton, with great emotion, said to Mrs. Harrison, "Does Dr. Warton know, my dear sister, what sort of a life I have led?"

"No doubt of it," she answered. "Being constantly resident in this parish, and mixing, as he does, with all ranks, he knows every thing of every body. You have nothing to conceal from him; why should you hesitate, therefore, to talk freely to him?"

"If you are thoroughly acquainted with my circumstances, Dr. Warton," he said, turning towards me, but not venturing to meet my countenance front to front, "you will understand pretty well upon what principle I am acting. A person who has lived as I have, has no comfort but in the supposed falsehood of Christianity."

"Pardon me, Mr. Compton," I replied, "there is no comfort for you but in the supposition of its truth."

"How so, Sir?" he inquired hastily, and lifted his eyes from the floor, and encountered mine; and then reiterated his question, "how so, I beseech you?"

"You confess yourself a sinner," I answered. "The gospel, if true, is the religion of sinners;

and it is its peculiar business, and professed object, to save all sinners who believe, embrace, and trust in it. This is precisely what you want; and it should, therefore, be the ground of unutterable comfort to you to suppose Christianity true. But, if the Gospel be false, yet, as you cannot certainly know it to be so, there is no comfort for sinners, from the mere supposition of its falsehood; unless it be a comfort to them to think that perchance they may die, like the beasts which perish, and so be annihilated for ever!"

"Well," he said, interrupting me before I had finished, "and is not *that* better than to think of being tormented for ever?"

"Undoubtedly it is," I replied; "but still the rational soul, if there be any spark of nobleness about it, abhors annihilation, and would almost prefer to abide the risk of eternal punishment, in order to avoid the dreadful thought of being no more to all eternity. Is annihilation indeed your own choice; and is your love and desire of it the baneful cause of this relentless warfare which you wage against Christianity?"

Mr. Compton fetched a deep sigh, and answered, I am, perhaps, as capable as another of aspiring to immortality; and the idea of annihilation, in the abstract, spreads a gloomy horror over my imagination, the same as it does to all men of an

ingenuous spirit. But I prefer it, as the least evil of two. A blissful immortality I suppose myself incapable of obtaining; and, therefore, upon the supposition of Christianity being true, my lot can only be an immortality of wo. Is it any wonder, then, that I should fear to be convinced of the truth of a scheme, which threatens me with so many horrors? No, no; I do not court or love annihilation; I shudder at the thoughts of——”

Here for a moment his utterance was suspended; but soon, by a sort of convulsive energy, he finished the sentence, and ejaculated the tremendous monosyllable, “Hell.”

Mrs. Harrison turned pale, and seemed ready to faint; and, therefore, to relieve her, I took up the conversation without a moment's delay. “Compose yourself, my good Sir,” I said, “and let us try quietly to put this matter upon its right footing. We are straying, I think, from the exact question, and bringing things into debate which ought not to be brought in. Allow me to ask you this; will your wishing about any thing in any particular way, or fearing about it in any particular way, or being convinced by probable arguments in any particular way, make the thing to be according to your wishes, your fears, or your conviction?”

He granted that it would not.

"Does it not often happen," I asked again, "that men wish, and fear, and are convinced, exactly in opposite ways, about the same thing?"

"Certainly," he said.

"Then," I rejoined, "it is clear, that both cannot possibly be in the right."

He allowed it.

"There is, also," I said, "another thing to be taken into account; that not only may a thing be true, which you have convinced yourself by probable arguments to be false; but also the fact, that other people are convinced by argument the contrary way, must tend to weaken your own conviction, and to create doubts in your mind as to the validity of it; from whence I would infer, that it is next to impossible for you to arrive at a firm unshaken conviction with respect to the falsehood of Christianity. You may think that the evidence against it preponderates over the evidence for it; but, as your own judgment has no exclusive privilege of being in the right, and as the greatest of men in all ages, the Bacons, the Boyles, the Lockes, the Addisons, the Newtons, have come to the contrary conclusion, you *must* think also, that the chances in favor of its truth are strong against you; and, consequently, you will never be able to bring yourself to so full a persuasion of what you wish, as to enjoy perfect



peace and tranquillity in your own breast. This I consider to be your case; and on this idea I said, that there is no comfort for you but in the supposition of the truth of Christianity."

This way of putting the question seemed to be new to him, and he was not prepared to answer at once; so I resumed the argument in this manner. "You wish to arrive at the conviction that Christianity is false. If you could do so, it might not accomplish your purpose nevertheless, which is to escape eternal punishment; because, in spite of your conviction, Christianity may be true, and you may wake again in another world to prove it."

He seemed agitated while I said this, but I continued thus:—"I assert, however, in the next place, that you will never arrive at that conviction. There is something in your own breast that will never suffer it. God himself, I believe, will never suffer it. A doubt, at least, about it, will always torment you, when you recollect the possibility of your being mistaken; the multitudes of great and good men, who have examined the subject and have been satisfied with it, living and dying in the faith of Christ; and the prodigious weight of the evidence itself, which it is extremely difficult for any man to gainsay, or resist. May I ask, Mr. Compton, whether you are not, since these recent conversations with *me*, at a greater



distance than ever from the conviction which you wish to entertain?"

"I am indeed," he confessed in a moment, and without the slightest hesitation. "My suspicions of the truth of Christianity increase daily."

"Then why resist increasing light?" I said. "Let me conjure you to endeavor to convert those suspicions, and all your fears, into hopes. You are laboring under an erroneous alarm, when you assume that there is no hope for you if Christianity be true. You have formed altogether a wrong idea of the gospel, if you think yourself, on account of your sins, without the pale of salvation, and reserved irreversibly for an immortality of wo. The gospel preaches repentance for the remission of sins to all."

Here he interrupted me with a deep sigh, and exclaimed, "Ah! Dr. Warton, *there* is the difficulty; insuperable I fear by *me*. I cannot repent of my sins, and consequently I must not expect remission of them. My gloomy anticipations, therefore, are too well justified."

"You cannot repent?" I said. "Granted; but what has that to do with the rejection of Christianity? Why, if there were no such religion as the Christian, if you were living by the light of nature alone, you would have thought repentance necessary, unless you reject a future state. Nay,

tell me candidly, were you not, in the beginning of our conversation this very day, on the point of arguing, that our own reason, without a revelation, would satisfy us of the necessity and of the efficacy of repentance ? Your not being able to repent, therefore, is not a valid reason for hesitating to accept Christianity."

"It is very true," he replied ; "but knowing that repentance is the great doctrine of the gospel, and thinking that, if it could be proved to be the doctrine of nature and reason, we shall have no need of the gospel, in that respect at least, I was prepared to argue thus."

"Very well," I said. "To make a rational system, in which repentance shall be necessary and useful, you would have assumed, no doubt, a future state of retribution ; and then repentance comes in, does it not, to avert the punishment which might otherwise have been inflicted in that future state ?"

"That is the way in which I should have argued," he replied, "but it would be ridiculous to do so now, when I stand confessed a sinner, an impenitent, incorrigible sinner ; or corrected only, as to the practice of sin, by the uncontrollable effects of my disease, not by any voluntary change of sentiment. No, no ! A state of retribution is not a state of my choice, or a state for *me* ; nor is

repentance, which should be preparatory to it; although repentance and retribution may be a discovery of that natural light which I might have pretended to reckon sufficient for us."

"Repentance," I said, "in the way in which it may be entirely useful to us, is not a discovery of nature; it is truly a Scripture doctrine. It is discoverable, indeed, by human reason, (not that human reason ever actually discovered it,) that the best thing which a wicked man can do, is to repent; so far nature may be supposed to dictate: but it is from Scripture alone that we learn the full extent of the efficacy of repentance, and why it is efficacious at all, namely, because of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. Then again, as to retribution, you know very well that the notions of the vulgar about it were mere fables and absurdities; you know, also, how the ancient philosophers disputed about a future state, and that they had no clear conceptions of it,—no, not even the wisest amongst them; and very few amongst them, indeed, had any idea of things being set right in that state by a just apportionment of rewards and punishments. Socrates, perhaps, came nearest to it. It was finely said by him, that for a righteous man, whether living or dying, it must be well; and when he was pressed with the supposition, that in this life every possible calamity

and injustice might befall his righteous man, he seems to insinuate, on that very ground, that another life was necessary to remedy the irregularities of this; to reward suffering virtue, and to punish successful vice. But, in truth, the whole business, in all its detail, is a matter of revelation. Deeply thinking men, like Socrates, might have caught some glimmerings of a reckoning to be made hereafter;—but of the awful day of a general judgment, the great Judge himself, the sentence which he will pronounce, and the everlasting rewards and punishments to follow it; of these they could have learnt nothing by reason and argument;—all these are purely doctrines of Scripture. But this is scarcely to our present purpose. You no longer consider it worth contending for, whether repentance and retribution be discoveries of nature, or of the gospel; if retribution be to take place, and the sinner must be condemned without repentance, in whatever way he comes to the knowledge of it, repentance is his great sheet-anchor, and he must cling to it inseparably to escape the wreck of his immortal soul.”

“Aye, aye,” he exclaimed, “but I should not have allowed the immortality of the soul.”

“No,” I said, “nor the being of a God either, for we must have come to that at last.”

He blushed, but continued, “Perhaps not, if I

had persevered in the same sentiments with which I set out this morning; and I should have probably argued, that, unless the immortality of the soul and the being of a God were established on the firmest grounds, nothing else could be admitted for a moment. Not that I do not myself think that there is a God, and that the soul is immortal, instinctively, as it were, when I reflect seriously upon it; but I foolishly fancied that it would be some relief to my mind, if, when the question was argued, there should appear to be any failure of proof. But I yield so far; the suspicion, I am sure, would for ever haunt me; I will debate it, therefore, no more. There is a God; and the soul, for *me*, shall be henceforth immortal, and consequently destined to be judged hereafter for its doings here. I grant this; and therefore also, that, if possible, it must be cleansed by repentance from the stains with which this world may have defiled it. Repentance, then, I admit in theory, but I do not find how to practise it. At present my only sorrow is, that I can no longer pursue the enjoyments which constituted my former happiness; and you will not deign, I presume, to call *this* repentance."

"No, indeed," I said, "I should betray you if I did; the truth must not be concealed from you by *me*. *That* which you describe is no godly

sorrow, the fruit of real penitence; it is a mere worldly sorrow—a sorrow which produces death and not life—which would destroy the soul to all eternity, instead of cleansing it for eternal happiness. But, strictly speaking, it is the blood of Christ only which cleanses from all sin. No repentance can undo, in any sense, what has once been done. In *Him*, therefore, must you lay your foundation; you must build upon that rock; from faith towards *Him* must spring the true repentance, which is never to be repented of itself. This repentance, believe me, is no merely human work, and therefore as yet you have it not; you seek it not from above, from whence alone it comes, by the instrumentality of the third person in the holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, who, with the Father and the Son together, is one God. This doctrine is no idle speculation, as you may now begin to feel yourself."

"I remember," he said, "what is asserted about this doctrine very well; it appears exceedingly extraordinary to me; you lay the greatest stress upon the divinity of Jesus Christ, without the acknowledgment of which you affirm that a man wishing to be a Christian cannot stir a single step; in short, that he would have no inducement to set about the task of repentance and reformation of life, because he could not know or



suppose that any atonement for sin had been made. I cannot describe to you how difficult all this appears to me; you must go back, therefore, if you please, to these points: but I am prepared, I assure you, to listen to your explanations, or to debate the matter with you, in a very different spirit from what I had intended. Before, I trembled at the idea of believing such things: now, I fear lest I may never be brought to believe them."

I could not but rejoice at this declaration. It opened a new ray of hope, for it seemed to show that the unhappy man was convinced that wickedness of heart and life, was the great difficulty which had recently exerted its influence in keeping him an enemy to Christianity. This is, all the world over, the great difficulty in the way, and when it is once removed, hope comes immediately in.





## CHAPTER II.

### THE MAIN ARGUMENT.

I SECRETLY thanked God for the change which had already taken place in the tone and sentiment of my sick friend, and implored his divine aid in the great work which yet remained. Much indeed was done, but much was still to do, and could only be done by the divine help. I acknowledge that help already, for never did any conversation begin with so little prospect of success as on this day. In the very outset, it was turned out of the channel in which the sceptic himself designed it to proceed, and took a much more fortunate range, as was proved by the event. But how to take advantage of the present favorable posture of things was the problem now to be solved, and before I had thought one single minute about it, the coach stopped. We had arrived without being aware of it on the ridge of a hill, which formed a natural terrace of a considerable length, from whence, on both sides, there was a rich, diversified prospect of the surrounding country. On the western side particularly, the scenery was strikingly magnificent; the declivity of the hill was

clothed with a fine hanging wood down to the bottom, except that here and there some rugged rocks, in various picturesque forms, started out from amongst the trees, and filled the eye with surprise and delight. Below, in the depths of the valley, a river was winding along, of ample dimensions, and all alive with sails. On its banks were countless villas glittering in the sun. Tracing the stream downwards, you saw it, at the distance of some miles, approaching the great town in our neighborhood, the spires and towers of which were clearly discernible. Some blue hills, very remote, made the back-ground of the picture.

Such was the view from the carriage itself, well able to charm away every sorrow, and to disperse every gloom, but that of despair. Mr. Compton was very desirous that his sister, who was a stranger to it, should be conducted to various points not accessible but on foot; and that she should have time to admire every thing. I took her, therefore, under my charge to the first seat, a little below the brow of the hill, where a glade, opened through the wood, let in the chief features of the landscape. Whilst we were seated there, Mr. Compton drove backwards and forwards on the greensward at the top.

Mrs. Harrison was sufficiently awake to the

beauties of this enchanting scene; but the state of her brother was nearest to her heart; so, after a little delay, she said to me, "Indeed, Dr. Warton, I flatter myself that we have advanced many steps to-day. I had a little glimmering of hope in my mind, when my brother made such an arrangement as to leave Mr. Harrison at home, for he feels toward him a degree of reserve which would prevent him from unbosoming his real sentiments in his presence, on so momentous a subject as that of religion; but the hope vanished, when he refused to answer your questions; and then again was suddenly realized by the free, unexpected declaration of his opinions, and still more by his avowal of a determination to confer amicably with you, and to relinquish all cavilling in your future discussions on Christianity."

"Very well, my dear Madam," I replied; "but how are we now to proceed?"

"We depend entirely upon your judgment and kindness," she answered; "but he has himself pointed out some topics, which he wishes to understand, and which are, at the same time, of essential consequence to the faith and practice of every Christian; you will, without doubt, be so good as to go on with the work which you have begun, and explain those topics to him."

"By all means," I said; "but what is to be

the mode of explanation? Will he admit the Scriptures, and be satisfied with texts produced out of them? Or must we pursue a different method?"

"I fear it will be necessary," she replied, "to pursue a different method? If he admits the Scriptures, his conviction will be an easy task to you."

"I am not so sure of *that*," I said: "it will certainly be a most astonishing point gained; but he may dispute about the interpretation. Suppose he were to say, when pressed with a text, that different sects of religionists interpreted that text in different ways, and then argue, that it is impossible for him to know which is in the right?"

"He will yield, I think, to *your* authority, Dr. Warton," she answered: "besides, you will be able to cite the text in the original language; and as my brother was educated at Oxford, and before that at a great school, I should hope that he had not so entirely forgotten his Greek, as to be incompetent to judge of your arguments."

"If that be the case," I said, "we shall proceed smoothly and rapidly, so far as the interpretation is concerned. But to understand Christianity, and to be a Christian one's self, are almost as wide from each other as east from west. Whence is to come the Christian spirit? But I do not despair, with God's blessing."

"I trust not," she replied; "so, if you please, we will quit this beautiful spot, after taking another hasty view of it, and return to the object of our solicitude."

Upon this, she rose from the seat; and when I had told her to whom some of the most attractive residences belonged, we re-ascended the hill; and having soon met the carriage, we resumed our places in it, and the coachman was ordered to drive homewards. Something was said about the noble prospects which we had just been viewing, and Mrs. Harrison thanked her brother for bringing her to see them; but the more important matter, which had engaged us before, seemed still to be in possession of all our faculties. Mr. Compton himself was satisfied with making a very few inquiries, and was evidently anxious to revert to the former subject of conversation. I was ready to follow wherever he might choose to lead me, and I waited to see if he would propose any thing; but before he did so, Mrs. Harrison, alarmed at the waste of such precious moments, interrupted the painful silence, and prepared the way for the renewal of our religious discussions.

"Well, my dear brother," she said, "I am longing to get back to the point at which we stopped upon our arrival at this beautiful scene. I find that I receive from these discussions an ac-

cession to my knowledge, and a confirmation of my faith. Will you mention, therefore, to Dr. Warton, what chiefly presses upon your mind under the present circumstances?"

"I am thinking about it," was his answer; "and it appears to me, that it would clear the road for the reception of other things, if Dr. Warton would enlarge a little upon repentance. It is a dictate of nature, to a certain limit at least; although I am aware that the main dependance of the heathens was upon sacrifice. If they offended their gods, they looked to sacrifice, I believe, and not to repentance, as the means of reconciliation with them. How they came to think of sacrifices, which seem quite out of the way, and to neglect repentance, which so slight an effort of reason might have taught them, I am totally at a loss to conjecture. However, in the course of ages and the progress of discovery, which is the same in morals as in other things, we may naturally suppose that repentance would be discovered; and if a real reform took place in the lives of men, what more could be desired? What need of such a scheme as the Christian atonement, which appears to *me* inexplicable?"

"A plausible, if not a satisfactory, explanation may be found," I said, "for the several matters which you propose to me. With respect to sacri-



fice, the origin may be doubtful ; but the rite itself seems to point very clearly to the doctrine of atonement. . If men themselves were the inventors of sacrifice, it is hardly possible, one should think, but that they must have had a decided notion of atoning for their sins by the death of another animal in their own stead. By such a proceeding an acknowledgment might have been implied, that they deserved death in their own persons, but that they trusted to the mercy of their deities to accept the death of some less valuable living creature substituted for them. On the other hand, if sacrifice was an original injunction of God himself, there can be no doubt whatever of its being intended to accustom the minds of men, from the beginning, to the idea of an atonement ; that they might be the better prepared to understand and accept the great atonement that was made, by the one sacrifice of Christ, once for all, for the sins of the whole world ; when all other sacrifices were thenceforth to be abolished, and men were in future to put their trust in *that* alone. At all events, when God selected the Jews for a particular purpose, he adopted the rite of sacrifice ; and the sacred authors tell us, that all the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law, and that of the Paschal Lamb especially, were but types or representatives of the sacrifice of Christ, to which alone they owed all their efficacy.

“ With respect to repentance, which you think so natural, if men fell into the way of sacrifice in preference to it, though you cannot account for sacrifice, you ought to conclude, that they were aware of some great difficulty, or some great defect in repentance, which occasioned them to neglect it. The difficulty might be, that they were reluctant to amend their lives; and the defect, that repentance was no atonement. Whatever might be their future conduct, still they might expect to be punished for the past; and consequently there was such a want of encouragement to abandon vice and pursue virtue, that few resorted to repentance, and still fewer proposed it as a remedy. But how different is the case under our holy religion! Atonement is the very corner-stone of the whole building; an atonement, too, not by the blood of bulls and goats, which had no value, except in consequence of God’s appointment and promise; but by the blood of the Son of God, which had an inherent value of its own, inestimable and infinite, and was therefore adequate to purge away the sins of all mankind. On the strength of this atonement, however, we may lament the past, yet if we obey God’s righteous laws in future, we need not fear. Another has been bruised for our iniquities; the sins of us all were laid on *Him*; and by his stripes we are healed. God is perfectly reconciled to us;

we may cast off the burdensome load of former guilt which weighed us to the ground, and begin a new career with unimpeded vigor and unincumbered hopes.

Upon the whole, the doctrine of an atonement seems to accord with the common sense of mankind; and although, as I said early in the morning, they might have thought repentance the best method of proceeding in cases of sin, yet they could never have thought that even the most perfect repentance would undo the past, or, in other words, be a sufficient reason to induce the Deity to overlook it. A simple change of life does nothing towards the vindication of God's violated laws; the divine sanction is trampled upon with manifest impunity; there is no punishment to operate as an example to others, or a penalty to the offenders themselves. This system, it is plain, would not do for human governors, and much less will it do for the great moral Governor of the universe. But by our gospel system his justice is satisfied, and his wrath appeased; and he can now, therefore, without any impeachment of his other attributes, exercise the lovely attribute of mercy. He can pardon upon repentance."

When I had finished, Mrs. Harrison exclaimed immediately, not waiting for Mr. Compton to speak, "Now, my good brother, how does this

matter appear to you ? I confess at once, for myself, that I never saw it so clearly before. Dr. Warton, you set out with telling us, that we were only to expect a plausible solution of the suggested difficulties ; at least you spoke with diffidence of your being able to give a satisfactory one : but to *me*, I assure you, this is quite satisfactory, and I think it must be so to *you*, brother."

So much ingenuousness on the part of Mrs. Harrison appeared to produce a good effect on Mr. Compton, and he said, " What you have advanced, Dr. Warton, appears certainly to be well worthy of a most attentive consideration ; but the Christian scheme would be more intelligible to *me*, if it were merely an abolition of the tedious and costly ceremonies of sacrifice ; a confirmation of what nature prompted in respect to repentance ; and the admission of it as the cancelling of the past. Then I would accept Jesus Christ for a person divinely commissioned to republish, in its best form, and with its greatest force, the whole law of nature, and more particularly the essential doctrine of the efficacy of repentance ; to give mankind clearer and more consistent notions of a future state of rewards and punishments ; and to bear witness to his own sincerity, and to the truth of what he preached, by his sufferings and death. This I can understand very well ; when I go out

of these bounds, I am like a man wading beyond his depth in some dark and fathomless ocean."

"Then," I said, "you would consider Jesus Christ (setting aside his divine mission) in the same light as you would Socrates, or rather, perhaps, as Ridley, Latimer, and Cranmer; as a martyr, and not a Redeemer and Savior?"

"I would," he answered; "*that* is the easiest way of viewing the matter, and of explaining it."

"It may seem so," I said, "at first sight, perhaps, and theoretically, if you leave the Scriptures out of the question. But have you thought at all how to get rid of the Scriptures, or of the particular passages which militate directly against your theory, or how to reconcile them with it?"

"No, I have not," he confessed; "my theory is but just come into my imagination, in consequence of our recent conferences."

"Well, then, I must tell you," I said, "that the gospel is totally irreconcilable with such a theory, nor could you make it otherwise by any efforts whatever. The doctrines and the history are so interwoven together, that you cannot separate them without destroying the whole. It is like the coat woven throughout, from the top to the bottom, without a seam; it is not to be parted; you may cast lots upon it, if you please, but you must take all or none."

Here I paused for his answer; and, after appearing to turn the matter over in his thoughts for a few moments, he said, "I am not disposed to debate with you to-day the genuineness of the Scriptures. That there was such a person as Jesus Christ; that he was the founder of the Christian religion; and that he was put to death by crucifixion, we know from heathen authors; and I believe that all the further information which we have about himself and his religion, in the vast variety of books that have been written upon the subject, is either fabulous or taken from the Scriptures themselves. At all events, I will admit them for the present, as the fountain head from which we must draw materials for argument."

"To come to the point then at once," I said, "take that memorable text, which I have already quoted for another purpose; having mentioned it before, it suggests itself first to my mind now:— 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Now, what a number of particulars have we here, which are quite inexplicable on *your* supposition. First, Jesus Christ is not simply a man, like one of the prophets or martyrs. Secondly, he is the Son of God in so peculiar and appropriate a sense, as to be God's only begotten Son. Thirdly,



it is necessary to believe in him, a distinction which none of the prophets or martyrs ever arrogated to themselves. Fourthly, the consequence of believing in him is two-fold; an escape from perishing like brutes, or from being punished eternally like the devils; and the attainment of immortality, or of infinite bliss and glory. And fifthly, that God gave him to the world, because he loved the world in an extraordinary degree, and for the very purpose that the world might believe in him, and thus be saved from wrath and admitted into grace. Whether we comprehend these things or not, makes no difference now; this is the brief outline of the Christian religion, and you cannot square it to your theory. The single expression, that God gave him, leads inevitably to the most momentous conclusions—Gave him for what? Undoubtedly, to die. And why to die? That men may believe in him, you are expressly told. Yes; and what is more, that their belief in him may purchase for them the astonishing gift of everlasting life. But what has their believing in him, as a person who died, to do with their own attainment of life? Ah! Mr. Compton, in what other way shall we attempt to explain this, but as the rest of the Scriptures explain it? Why, he died for *them*; *his* death was the atonement for *their* sins; and by their faith in him they are put into a



capacity of reaping the benefits of that death, which are, freedom from guilt and punishment, and restoration to righteousness, happiness, and immortality."

After saying so much I stopped, as before, to ascertain whether he was satisfied, or not; but before he had determined what his reply should be, Mrs. Harrison interposed, and reminded us of the form in which our blessed Lord and Savior had instituted the holy sacrament of his body and blood. "Upon presenting the bread, his words were, 'Take, eat, this is my body, which is given for you;' and upon presenting the wine, his words were, 'This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for *you*, and for many, for the remission of sins.'"

"They are decisive," I said, "both that his being given implied his death, and that his death was a sacrifice—the shedding of his blood for the remission of sins marks the atonement incontestably; and it is the general doctrine of Scripture, that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission. What is your opinion of this, Mr. Compton?"

"That all the heathens," he answered, "trusted in their sacrifices, I have allowed already, and it cannot be denied; and the Jews also did the same. Now, might not Jesus Christ, being a Jew, have taken advantage of this feature in the

Jewish law, and so represent his own death as to make it appear to accord with that law, as well as with the prejudices of the heathens?"

"What?" I said; "before his death took place? If his partisans had done this after his death, he himself having given no hint of it during his life, the objection might have been worth considering. But in the way in which you put it, it is not tenable for a moment. Besides, the very supposition that he represented things differently from what they really were, insinuates that he was an impostor or an enthusiast; an impostor, if he knowingly stated an untruth; an enthusiast, if he ever fancied himself to be appointed as a sacrifice and atonement for the sins of mankind, whilst he had no claim to so sublime an office. But his whole character, and all his actions, and all the rest of his doctrines, and every precept which he delivered, negative at once the insinuation of imposture and enthusiasm. He preached and was the pattern of every virtue; he performed miracles; he foretold future events; he foretold his own death, exactly as it occurred; and I must, therefore, believe that his death was what he represented it to be."

"Well, Dr. Warton," he said, "suppose we relinquish this charge for the present. I should be glad to know whether the oriental manner of

speaking figuratively will not account for a great deal, without resorting to such difficult doctrines, which, in fact, rest upon the mere letter. In the institution of the sacrament, for instance, which my sister has just mentioned, you dispute against the Roman Catholics, for a figurative in preference to a literal meaning." Then, like a person pleased with a new thought, which he imagines will work wonders, he added, "I suspect, that if this figurative mode of speaking be well considered, it would enable us to solve, in a simple manner, much that is perplexing to the intellect, and revolting to our most deeply rooted feelings, if taken literally."

"It has been well considered long ago," I answered; "and with respect to the prophetic parts of the Bible, which are most figurative, it is not difficult to establish certain rules, by which the true meaning may be fixed. Sometimes the prophecy itself is afterwards explained, as our Savior explained his parables; sometimes one part of a prophecy, which is dark, is explained by another part which is clear; sometimes, again, one whole obscure prophecy is illustrated by others which are less so; and there are various ways besides, which might be mentioned, if it were necessary to go fully into the subject. You may conceive, therefore, how the language of prophecy comes at

length to be pretty well understood ; but with respect to the doctrines of the New Testament, the same modes are not so applicable. Indeed, the expression is in general not figurative, but perfectly simple. I do not mean, however, that one thing does not help to explain another ; or that parts of a thing may not help to explain the whole ; but only that no general rules of interpretation can precisely be laid down. Take an example from what Mrs. Harrison suggested to us. Our Lord said, that no man could be saved without eating his flesh and drinking his blood ; and this appeared to many of his followers to be a doctrine so hard of digestion, that they absolutely abandoned him rather than embrace it. Yet he told them, in that particular case, that his words were not to be interpreted literally, although he did not then tell them what the true meaning was. And perhaps we should never have known it, if it had not been afterwards explained by the institution of the sacrament of the bread and wine, which he called his body and blood, and which he enjoined us all to eat and drink, in memory of his death, to the end of the world. Thus every difficulty arising from the figurative mode of expression might well be supposed to have been entirely cleared away. But the Roman Catholics were not willing to think so, and they will still have *that* to be literal.

which he insinuated to be spiritual, or figurative; and consequently, they invented, and continue to uphold, their doctrine of transubstantiation, to explain the words, 'this is my body,' and 'this is my blood.' Here, however, for the right explanation of *these* expressions, we may justly refer them to the innumerable similar forms of expression, which are undoubtedly figurative; 'I am the vine;' 'I am the gate,' and a thousand others. The meaning of these is evident at once; and I do not see why the meaning of the sacrament form should puzzle any body more than they do.

"Take another instance of a doctrine which has been also previously mentioned; 'I and my Father are one.' Viewing this in the abstract, it might mean, first, I and my Father are one Person; but when we go to the original, and observe that the expression is *ἐν* and not *ἐίς* we give up that interpretation at once. Next then it must mean, I and my Father are one thing; but in what sense one thing? There is some union between them undoubtedly; but whether a union of sentiment only, or of substance, and consequently of sentiment too, we cannot decide by this passage alone. If it be a union of substance which *we* of this church affirm, then the expression *ἐν* is literal; if it be a union of sentiment only, the expression is figurative; and we cannot decide the ques-

tion, without a comparison of this passage with others, and, perhaps, not without a large view of the whole gospel.

“ You will perceive by these examples that your suggestion has been attended to, when the reason of the thing demands it, and when it is warranted by the rest of Scripture ; but in the case of the doctrine of the atonement, the expressions seem to admit but of a single meaning, and *that* the literal one. Those expressions too are to be met with perpetually. The very word ‘ ransom ’ defies, I think, the possibility of perversion, and settles the question for ever. ‘ He gave his life a ransom for many.’ How can you, by any stretch of ingenuity, interpret this otherwise than that the death of Christ was in the stead of the death of others ? ”

“ That is a very strong term, certainly,” he replied, in a tone of moderation, “ nor, do I know how to rebut your interpretation of it ; but I cannot so easily reconcile myself to the doctrine, which, in its literal sense, it implies. After all, however, if a ransom were necessary, or expedient, might it not have been paid by a mere man, supposing him to be a man of perfect justice, and one who fulfilled the whole moral law of virtue and goodness ! ”

“ Unfortunately,” I said, “ your scheme abounds



with insuperable difficulties. First, where will you find such a man? The world never produced a being of that sort; and there is an end of the matter. But, secondly, if you could find such a person, how would his life or death operate as an atonement for others? Will you adopt the Roman Catholic notion, and assume, that he might perform works of supererogation, and so leave behind him an abundant stock of merit, out of which the deficiency of all others may be supplied for ever? No, no; this is too ridiculous. I ask you, is not every man, in every situation in which he may be placed, under a sort of moral obligation, to act according to the most perfect law of his nature, or according to the best light which he enjoys?"

He allowed it.

"Can he then," I asked again, "do more than his duty, or more than is proper and right for himself?"

"I believe," he answered, "that I must grant he cannot."

"Well, then," I said, "his power of making an atonement for others is quite out of the question. It vanishes at once, and we are compelled to resort to some one, who is more than man; to some one, who, possessing indeed the human nature, and executing in that nature, by the help of a divine Spirit residing within him, every particle of



the moral law of righteousness, has something far greater and better to offer for the fallen race of mankind, to propitiate an offended God, and to reconcile Him to them; even the transcendant, unspeakable merit of a Being, who, having himself the form of God, hesitated not to empty himself of all his eternal splendor and glory, to hide himself under a poor degraded vesture of mortal flesh, and to submit to pain, and ignominy, and death; thus becoming a sacrifice, infinite in value, and commensurate with the infinite extent of sin. O what an argument for love, and obedience, on our parts! O what a pattern of condescension and humility, for *us* to imitate in our conduct to our fellow creatures! But, above all, what a lesson of awe and fear! How forcibly calculated to inspire us with a thorough hatred and abhorrence of sin; that monstrous evil, which God would not, or could not pardon, without a sacrifice, so wonderfully, so incomparably great!"

Just at this moment the carriage stopped at the Rectory, and so, without waiting for any reply, I jumped out, and left them.

Reflecting afterwards upon this long conversation, when I was sitting quietly at home, in the course of the same day, I could not but flatter myself, that, upon the whole, great good had been

done. That he was convinced upon all the branches of the subject which he had discussed, I was far from thinking; but that his mind was satisfied upon some points, and his opinions shaken upon others, I had no doubt whatever. With respect to a real, practical repentance, I did not yet expect it. More pain and suffering, and less chance of returning to the world, seemed necessary to wean him from it in a sufficient degree to make a solid basis for an effectual change of his heart and affections. But things, I trusted, were in the right train, if it might please God to prolong his life for a certain period. A sudden death, however, was to be feared; and a sudden death would probably ruin every thing. Under all these circumstances, therefore, delay was dangerous, and most sedulously to be avoided; yet events could not be hastened, nor opportunities be created at will.

With these impressions, I called very early in the afternoon of the following day. I was informed that Mr. Compton, after a restless night, had got up late, and was laid as usual on the sofa, and had no spirit to attempt any thing else. Orders, however, had been given that no visitors should be denied admittance to him; so Mr. Harrison, without scruple, conducted me to him at once: but he was unable to satisfy my curiosity as to the results of yesterday. Mr. Compton, he said, had been

very silent and thoughtful during the whole evening after his return from the drive, and had made no remark, even to his sister, upon the conversation which had passed, although she tried often to lead him to it. Yet it was evident that he was full of it, and that his mind was deeply at work upon the grave matters which had been debated between us. Nor had night and solitude, as far as Mr. Harrison could ascertain, afforded any truce to his troubled thoughts.

Being hastily informed of these particulars as we ascended the staircase, I expressed my fears upon first seeing him, lest yesterday's ride might have been too much for his strength; but he assured me that he had felt no unusual fatigue in consequence of it, and that, as for sleepless nights, they were his almost constant companions: "and I hope," he said, "that I have profited by the last, in mind at least, if not in body." Upon this I was all attention to hear what account he would give of himself, and without doubt he would have proceeded to gratify my eager desire of getting to the bottom of his feelings, had not a servant at this very moment announced the name of Mr. Langstone.

"Where is he?" cried Mr. Compton.

"He is on horseback at the door," answered the servant; "and he bade me say, Sir, that he wished very much to see you."

"By all means, then, bring him up," said Mr. Compton.

"But what shall we do with *you*, Dr. War-ton?" he added, when the servant had disappeared. "Mr. Langstone is rather brisk in his manners, and, I fear, has no respect for the clergy, to whose society he has been entirely unaccustomed; and he will probably assail me with many an arrow out of his quiver of raillery, if he should discover that I have talked so much of late with you. Will you call another time, or will you step into the adjoining room, and wait till he goes?"

"I will stay where I am," I replied, "if you will allow me. I am curious to see this redoubted knight, and perhaps I shall break a lance with him. I know his character full well."

Mr. Compton was rather alarmed when he heard my determination; but before he could attempt to change it, Mr. Langstone entered, and exclaimed, as he rapidly approached the sofa, "Well, Compton, how are you, my good fellow? Better, I hope, and likely to be amongst us again soon. But where is Laura, '*amata nobis, quantum amabitur nulla?*'" Mr. Compton held out his hand, but said nothing. He was vexed, as I supposed, that I should discover with what sort of persons, and how he had spent his days; but he evidently feared still more lest he should be cover-

ed with shame, when his weakness in admitting a clergyman to converse with him on matters of religion should become known to this blunt and profligate votary of pleasure. And that Mr. Langstone would both blab every thing, and find out every thing, he had little doubt; so heedless was he of character, and so likely to pester him with questions about Laura, and his present plans, and what not.

Mr. Langstone grasped Mr. Compton's hand, and exclaimed again, "What, man, not a word to greet me after two month's absence? Not a word about yourself? No Laura, as in the good old times?"

At last the sick man said, "Oh, Langstone, I have been very ill! The game was nearly up, and the lamps put out! I totter still on the brink of the grave!"

"Come, come," cried the other, "cheer up, man! you will not die this bout, I warrant you."

Then suddenly turning round, and seeing Mr. Harrison and me, who had risen upon his entrance, and had not reseated ourselves, "What," he said, "are these your doctors? why, I believe, I have dropped in upon you in the midst of a consultation. Well, gentlemen, what is your opinion of my friend's case?"

He would have run on, but seeing us look very

grave, he stopped short in his career, and Mr. Compton immediately said, pointing to each of us in succession, "That is Mr. Harrison, my brother-in-law, and this is Dr. Warton."

Upon this Mr. Langstone bowed slightly to Mr. Harrison, and when I was prepared for the same civility, he drawled out in the attitude of one thinking, "Dr. Warton? Why, is not Dr. Warton the parson of your parish, whom we used to—— I beg his pardon; the rector I should have called him."

"Oh! it does not matter, Sir," I said, smiling; "if you look into Blackstone, you will find that parson is the more honorable title."

And then addressing myself to Mr. Compton, I told him that his friend, Mr. Langstone, seemed to expect to find an M. D. rather than a D. D. by his side; but that there were times, perhaps, when the D. D. might be the most useful, although I hoped that in his case the M. D. might be useful too.

Mr. Compton shook his head, and said, "Well, well: sit down all of you. What will become of *me* is very doubtful. But I must introduce you, Langstone, to Dr. Warton. If he were not present, I would describe him to you."

"You have often done it," exclaimed Langstone sneeringly, and interrupting him. "Which description am I to abide by, that of Compton

well, or that of Compton sick? That of the courageous or that of the timorous Compton? That of the enemy or that of the slave to superstition?"

This was a difficult attack for Mr. Compton to parry. It disconcerted and abashed him, and the more so, because he had been every moment in expectation of it, and he was yet too much of a novice in the ways of religion to withstand even a single sarcasm. The seed had fallen upon ground which lacked moisture and depth of soil, and therefore was too likely to wither away upon the first attack of heat.

With the hope of being able to throw a shield before him, I interposed and said, "It is no wonder, if men see things with a different eye in sickness and in health; nor does it follow that the courage which health inspires, is a wise courage, or the fear which is inspired by sickness a foolish fear. Another thing, too, I have generally observed—that the enemies of true religion are the greatest slaves to superstition. Have you none of these, Mr. Langstone, amongst your own acquaintance? Mr. Compton, I dare say, has ridiculed me often under other circumstances. I beg he will make no excuses about it. His change of conduct is the best apology; and I trust that he will have no cause to regret, but every cause to rejoice, in that change. If his fears have wrought



upon him, I admire and applaud his present fears more than his former courage. I will venture to use a strong term: his former courage was nothing but fool-hardihood. The approach of death is terrible to all. What must it be to one who knows not whither he is going? It has pleased God, merciful in the midst of severity, to show Mr. Compton his irresistible power, without striking him to the ground; and Mr. Compton has the wisdom to look to the hand which inflicts the blow with awe and fear; and to reflect within himself, and to advise with persons of supposed competence (with the parson, if you will,) upon the steps which are to be taken by one in his precarious condition. It is too desperate a plunge to be made blindfold. So thought Lord Rochester—one of the wittiest and most profligate of men, whilst his courage, as you call it, supported him; but, at length, when assailed by the King of Terrors, a willing, and a patient, and a humble listener to the arguments and the counsels of a Christian bishop.”

Thus I spoke, with very little idea of producing any good effect upon Mr. Langstone, but with the greatest of doing good to Mr. Compton; into whom I endeavored to infuse right sentiments by a sidewind, as it were, and by assuming that he acted on the principles which I conceived to be

proper for him. He made no remark; nor did Mr. Langstone at once. All he did at first was to stare with astonishment; sometimes at *me*, sometimes at Mr. Compton, sometimes at Mr. Harrison. But very soon suspecting by our countenances, I suppose, that we were all in earnest, and all of the same opinion, he exclaimed, "Upon my honor, Dr. Warton, it makes no difference to *you*, I perceive, whether you are in or out of your pulpit, or with or without your surplice. You can preach equally well in any place, and in any garb. But as you mention that fellow Rochester—that most cowardly of all poltroons, that base betrayer and belier of his own principles, of the principles of his whole life—I must tell you, that Compton and I have long ago made up our minds about his character; and that we thoroughly despise him, mean wretch as he was!"

The acrimony and the malignity with which Mr. Langstone uttered this philippic against Lord Rochester are quite indescribable. He almost gnashed his teeth with rage; and whilst the storm lasted, none of us attempted to speak; but having had its vent, it soon subsided; and he resumed in a milder tone,

"No, no, Sir! we shall not imitate this hero of yours, whom the men of your black cloth are

so fond of quoting; we are made of firmer stuff—I and Compton; we have none of those womanish fears.”

“God only knows,” I said, with solemnity, ‘God only knows, who shall be indulged and blessed with the opportunity of imitating Lord Rochester! They who wish for it, may wish for it too late; they who seek after it, may seek too late; and they who disdain the thought of it, must abide the perilous issue. It is throwing the dice for their lives; or rather, I should say, for their souls!’ Then relaxing into a different tone, I continued thus: “But why, Mr. Langstone, should you make so sure of Mr. Compton’s opinions on this point? A wise man changes his opinions according to circumstances, and as new light breaks in upon him. May not Mr. Compton, therefore, think differently now of Lord Rochester from what he did formerly, in the same manner, as it is plain by your seeing me here, that he thinks differently of *me*?”

“Nothing is too absurd to happen,” he cried indignantly; “why Compton has you here by his side, he can best explain. Neither he nor I had any personal dislike to you, Dr. Warton; for we had no acquaintance with you whatever. It is the genus, not the individual, against which we bear arms, and would emancipate mankind, if we

could, from their leading-strings. I tell you this fairly and openly; I am not a man of concealment. Oh, what mischiefs has Christianity produced in the world! and the clergy alone bolster it up from falling! They have bestridden us, and kept us in disgraceful subjection for ages. But with respect to Rochester, the foolish story about him pretends to tell us, that the prophecies, forsooth, converted him. Truly, if it were so, the man's intellect must have been turned topsy-turvy, as I rather indeed suspect; for never was there such a farrago of nonsense as those self-styled prophecies. I and Compton examined them together, Dr. Warton; and I know he agrees with me, that they are a heap of confusion, a mass of unintelligible, unconnected, incoherent rhapsodies—darker than the darkest oracles of the heathens themselves. If Rochester's conversion arose from these, Compton, I am confident, can never agree with him, or stoop to the same degradation." Thus he went on, in his own peculiar, dogmatical style, unused to contradiction, and expecting to bear down all before him.

"I am afraid, Mr. Langstone," I said coolly, in reply, "that you have not given yourself sufficient time to study the prophecies. May I be permitted to ask, whether you understand the original language in which they were written?"

“What, the Hebrew? Not I, indeed,” he answered petulantly.

“But,” I asked again, “you have read, I presume, some or all of the great commentators, who have explained the prophecies?”

“I read those musty folios and quartos!” he replied, as before. “No, in truth, I have not been guilty of such a waste of my eyes and my time, which have been better employed.”

“Well, Mr. Langstone,” I said, “but you have looked at least into Lowth’s translation of Isaiah, which is neither musty by age, nor ponderous in size, for it may be had in the convenient and inviting shape of an octavo?”

He now became seriously angry upon being convicted of having taken no pains to understand what he had so harshly condemned; and he, therefore, asserted, with the greater positiveness and obstinacy, that “it would be the most absurd thing imaginable to sit down to study *that* which no study could render intelligible.”

“But Lowth,” I said, “and many of the other translators and commentators, were men of immense learning, and prodigious talents, were they not?”

“They may be,” he replied, “for what I know to the contrary. One thing I am sure of, that I shall never trouble myself to discover their blunders.”

“Well,” I said, “whether they blundered or not, at least they must have supposed that the prophecies were capable of being made intelligible, by the help of translations, of notes, of commentaries, of criticisms, of paraphrases, of dissertations. Do not their very labors prove this?”

“It matters not one hair what they supposed,” he answered impatiently; “I stick to plain common sense, out of which I shall never be argued. Besides, was not Lowth advanced to the rank and wealth of a bishop? His evidence, therefore, is interested, and must be set aside. I suspect there are few of his cloth who would not attempt to prove that black is white for the sake of a bishopric.”

“Set him aside, then,” I said, “at once and without scruple, as well as all the rest of his fraternity. But there was one Newton, who wrote a dissertation upon the prophecies; not the eminent bishop of that name, who also wrote upon the same subject, but a much more eminent man—indeed the most eminent, perhaps, whom the world had seen, Sir Isaac I mean: that illustrious mathematician, who dived into the depth of Nature, and ascended victorious up to Nature’s God; a layman too; no candidate for rich pluralities, or bishoprics; simple-minded, like a child, but in power of reasoning, mighty as a giant; in grasp of intellect, sublime as an angel; what shall we

do with *him*? Shall we set *him* aside also, as a hypocrite, or an idiot; or shall we not rather bow, as to a superior being, who bent the whole force of his vast and comprehensive genius to the explanation of the works and the word of God alike?"

Mr Langstone not seeming to know exactly how to dispose of Newton, Mr. Compton interposed and said, "We, who stand up for reason, Langstone, must take care to have reason on our side, and not to go against her. We cannot, therefore, deny the great authority of Newton; who must have thought the prophecies capable of being explained, and also of high consequence, or he would never have interrupted his mathematical pursuits, which brought him so much glory, for the sake of attending to those prophecies. But certainly, Dr. Warton, upon a cursory view of them, they did appear to *me*, as my friend Langstone has just stated, very obscure, very incoherent, and generally unintelligible. However, there is no wonder that men attached to Christianity, whether from laudable or blameable motives, should attempt to explain them; for Christianity cannot stand without them."

"Very true," exclaimed Mr. Langstone, somewhat relieved by the latter part of Mr. Compton's speech: "this accounts perfectly for all the misplaced labors of so many bigots; but the pro-



phesies are lame legs for any thing to stand upon."

"It is the more marvellous, then," I said, "that Christianity has stood so long upon such a rotten foundation, and seems likely to stand to the end of time. But how do you assert that Christianity cannot stand without the prophecies, Mr. Compton?"

"I mean," he answered, "that the evidence of prophecy, be it what it may, is relied upon as one of the strongest."

"A revelation from God," I said, "abstractedly speaking, requires not to be attested by evidence of any particular sort. All that is absolutely necessary is, that it should be attested by sufficient evidence of some sort or other. Now, miracles do this for Christianity; and, therefore, all other evidences, and prophecies amongst the rest, might appear to be *ex abundanti*, and supererogatory; and, consequently, not worthy of all that learning and talent which have been expended upon them. But the fact is, that Jesus Christ himself appealed to the prophecies in proof of his being the Messiah, and therefore we are bound to search the prophecies, to try his pretensions by his own test, and to see whether his appeal be founded in truth. If he had claimed to be simply a divine Messenger, miracles would have been enough for him; but he claimed to be the Messiah, a particular

divine Messenger, supposed to be promised and described in the prophecies; and, therefore, we must of necessity look into those prophecies, to ascertain whether he corresponds to the description there given of the Messiah, or not; and if we find no traces of him there, then, indeed, his religion cannot stand. It is important to understand this matter rightly, and therefore I have tried to place it on the proper footing."

Mr. Harrison had been hitherto silent, but at this point of the discussion he interfered very opportunely, and said, "I am sure we ought all of us to be much obliged to Dr. Warton, for his clear account of the only way in which the prophecies become an essential evidence of Christianity. I confess, at all events, however, for myself, that the subject had not struck me precisely in this light before, and I am glad to be better informed. But, then, now comes the great question, whether there are, indeed, to be found in the prophecies intelligible traces of such a person as Jesus Christ actually was, in all the leading circumstances of his history; or whether every thing in those prophecies relating to the Jewish Messiah be not so vague, and indefinite, and obscure, as to defy such an application, without being wrested and tortured unreasonably for the very purpose. I am aware that the best and the greatest of men, of the

laity as well as of the clergy, have decided for themselves in the first affirmative; and to *their* authority I most willingly submit myself, being incompetent, with my own unassisted powers, to enter deeply enough into the investigation; and Mr. Langstone must excuse me, if I say, that I think his charges against the prophecies, thrown out at random, and in the absence of all proof of sufficient inquiry, are by no means weighty enough to be set in the scale against the combined, accumulated judgment of the very soundest judges in the world. But nevertheless, I presume you will allow, Dr. Warton, that the prophecies are dark and obscure; and if so, I should be gratified with hearing how you account for it."

This quiet and discreet way of arguing the question, and of asking for further information, was admirably adapted to Mr. Compton's situation, and conducted him gently to the point where we wished to lead him; but it did not appear that Mr. Langstone's abrupt, and hasty, and decisive asseverations against Christianity, were any impediment to us. Mr. Compton was conscious, no doubt, that he had been used to speak in the same manner himself, and he knew also with what little grounds of reason he had done so. Besides, he was probably now shocked in some degree at Mr. Langstone's, ungentlemanly tone, which would

have passed unnoticed before, in the midst of their revels, or, perhaps, would have obtained his applause. It was by such violence of assertion and declamation that they formerly upheld one another in their infidel sentiments; and it was not at the gaming-table, or in the company of such as Laura, that they were likely to acquire the softer tones of polished life. Yet he would not go so far as to check him pointedly. In fact, he was struggling between the false shame of being called an apostate from opinions which he had maintained with the same vehemence as Mr. Langstone, and the better conviction which began at length to take hold of his mind. The conflict was not yet finished, but as he had withstood the first brunt of it, the final issue was the less to be feared.

As for Mr. Langstone himself, I could not easily account to my own mind why he remained a moment longer with us, when he saw that two of the party had no value whatever for his authority; and when he had also some reason to suspect that even his bosom friend, Mr. Compton, did not prize it as he had formerly done. It was manifest, that none of us would admit any thing upon his mere *ipse dixit*, or mistake bold calumniations for sound arguments; and that we should try every sentence which he might utter, not by the uncertain rule of his own passions and prejudices, or by

the false logic of his school, but by the sure criterion of truth. But it is a rare thing for a man of his stamp to submit to such trammels. Mr. Compton had done it reluctantly; although chastened by affliction, and alarmed by the fear of death, and pressed by his sister, for whom he had a great regard, to confer with his pastor upon the evidences and doctrines of the gospel. It might be that Mr. Langstone considered himself bound to await the termination of a discussion which he alone had provoked; or that he might still entertain the hope to avert by some lucky turn the disgrace which impended over his fraternity, if Mr. Compton should desert them; or, perhaps, his confidence was not a whit abated by the moderate rebukes which he had yet received; or, after all, he might only stay, because he wished for an opportunity of being alone with Mr. Compton, and of sifting him with respect to his future intentions, and the rumored changes in his mode of life.

Be this as it may, my own line was obvious before me. It was evidently my business to bear, without shrinking, whatever might arise; to be calm and patient under the reproaches that might be cast upon my profession and office, and not to return any personal disrespect shown to myself. I had now involved myself with Mr. Compton, and appeared to be in the way of obtaining some

great advantage, which it would be very impolitic to sacrifice, or put to the hazard, from the want of exercising a certain degree of forbearance towards his friend, or from thinking that conceit, ill-humor, and petulance, should be met and resisted with a similar spirit.

These reflections flashed across my mind before I replied to Mr. Harrison's proposition; but they occupied a few moments only, so that the pause was scarcely sensible, and then I said, "You consider the prophecies to be obscure, Mr. Harrison; and Mr. Langstone has pronounced the same opinion in the strongest terms. You have heard no doubt of Porphyry."

"I have," said Mr. Harrison. "He was an early and inveterate enemy to Christianity."

"Yes," added Mr. Langstone, "and he was a man of no mean ability; keen and shrewd, with an eye to pierce through every deceit and disguise. Flourishing too, as he did, in remote antiquity, he saw the beginnings closer at hand, and could, therefore, survey things with more accuracy. His opinion is of the greatest weight."

Having thus quietly permitted Mr. Langstone to run himself down by his own impetuosity, I resumed and said, "Very well; Porphyry may be all, and more than you tell me; but, what is to our present purpose, he differed from you entirely

with respect to the prophecies. Instead of thinking them dark, and obscure, and indefinite, on the very contrary, he thought them so clear and precise in their application, especially those of Daniel, that he courageously maintained, against the utmost possible certainty itself, that they were written subsequently to the events which they pretend to foretell."

"And pray, Dr. Warton," interposed Mr. Langstone, "how is it so certain that they were not written after the events, as Porphyry so ingeniously supposed?"

Here was a happy and admirable specimen of the turnings, and windings, and rapid transitions of a sceptic and free-thinker. In a moment he left his former position, without blushing, to shift for itself, and eagerly caught at something else which held out the shadow of a more favorable issue. However, I met him on his new ground, and told him, without being discomposed, that it was certain; first, because the whole of the Old Testament was known to have been translated into the Greek language, by order of one of the Ptolemies, about two hundred years before the Christian era, which version we now possess under the name of the Septuagint; and, secondly, because the prophecies were always in the custody of the Jews, who, being hostile to Christianity, would never admit any thing to be dishonestly introduced



into them which might favor it. Then I said, "Observe now how completely Porphyry is at variance with *you*. He brought forward this strangest and most untenable of all charges against the prophecies, in order to get rid at once of the argument from prophecy; and his charge is founded upon their supposed clearness, whereas you affirm that they are so obscure as to be quite unintelligible. But the fact is, that the truth, as is generally the case, lies between the two extremes, namely, that they are not so obscure as to be unintelligible after the events, nor so clear as to be intelligible before them. I do not mean that there will not always be room for dispute in a variety of ways, and, in the case of some particular prophecies, even as to their fulfilment; but I say this, that prophecy accomplishes its object, if it be clear enough beforehand to excite hopes and expectations of fulfilment, and clear enough afterwards to satisfy unprejudiced minds that the fulfilment has really taken place. A certain degree of obscurity, meanwhile, is absolutely necessary beforehand to the accomplishment of this object, for you will not, I presume, contend, that it should be manifest at once, upon the delivery of the prophecy, exactly what the event is to be, and precisely when it is to occur, and what are all the instruments to be employed in bringing it about. This you

would not expect, nor therefore complain of the want of it. You could only debate about the degree, and what degree of obscurity should still remain, if any at all should remain, after the fulfilment of the prophecy, may admit of debate also; but certainly if no obscurity were to remain, faith would be at an end. We should have perfect demonstration instead of the highest probability; and therefore we should be entirely without any pretence of desert of any sort in believing, or rather we should be like those who have believed because they have seen, and have therefore no promise of any blessing attached to their conduct."

I expected to have been interrupted again and again during this long explanation; but Mr. Langstone had been rather disconcerted, and his keen edge perhaps somewhat blunted, by his having praised Porphyry so warmly, without being aware that his evidence was to be turned against him. However, he was silent even when I had finished, and waited, I suppose, for some better opportunity of attack. Mr. Harrison, I saw plainly, was prepared to approve and commend, most probably with sincerity, but at all events diplomatically, with a view to the benefit of Mr. Compton; but before he began what he intended to say, Mr. Compton himself replied to me.

"Your theory, Dr. Warton," he said, "must

needs be allowed to be a probable one. If what are called the prophecies be really prophecies, no doubt there should be such a mixture of clearness and obscurity about them as you mention, in order to effect the purpose for which they must be supposed to be intended. But, in point of fact, is this the case? Can it be satisfactorily made out by history or any well-known circumstances?"

"It can," I answered; "in consequence of these very prophecies, which, if we were to read cursorily and partially, without any knowledge of the Hebrew language, and without the help of commentators, we might be tempted to pronounce an indigested mass of crudities (setting aside, however, for the present, the astonishing magnificence and sublimity of numerous particular passages;) in consequence, I repeat it, of these very prophecies, the Jews did actually expect some extraordinary person to appear amongst them; and, what is more, they were in expectation of him about the time when Jesus Christ appeared. This is no *ipse dixit* of mine, invented for the occasion; it is attested by the Scriptures and by profane authors. And this expectation was not confined to the Jews, but extended to other nations, through the medium, no doubt, of the Jewish Scriptures. Tacitus and Suetonius mention the expectation as prevailing throughout the East from ancient times:

‘*Percrebuit toto Oriente vetus opinio.*’ You wish for facts; what stronger fact can you have than this, that the Jews, on the ground of this expectation, undertook that desperate war against the Romans, which ended in the destruction of their city and temple, and in their own dispersion throughout the world? For this irrefragable evidence, I refer you to the Roman authors whom I have already mentioned, and to the Jew Josephus, not one of whom ever became a Christian. Be the prophecies then as obscure as they may, they were clear enough to raise the expectation which was designed, but not so clear as to prevent the possibility, when the Messiah came, of all cavilling and disputing about his being the person intended by those prophecies. To *me*, indeed, it seems astonishing, that the Jews should ever have doubted about it at all; but the explanation of this fact, relied upon by learned men, cannot but be satisfactory to those who examine it. However, at this distance of time, we possess an advantage in estimating the question which the Jews of the Messiah’s time could not have, namely, the establishment of the Christian religion, which proves incontestably that Jesus was the Christ.”

“Certainly,” said Mr. Harrison, “as the prophecies all along represent the Messiah to be the author of a new covenant founded upon the old

one, and as Jesus Christ, claiming to be that Messiah, and accompanied with miraculous powers, promulgated a religion, which, against all human probabilities, soon established itself in the world, and exists in great veneration at this day, and seems to be diffusing itself more and more daily; this is a fact, which is a wonderful evidence of the truth of his pretensions."

Here Mr. Langstone, interrupting him, exclaimed sarcastically, "Then Mahomet, most likely, is another Messiah, for he too was the founder of a new religion, which is widely received, and highly venerated by its own votaries; and, by-the-by, I now remember, that the Jews themselves talk of two Messiahs, a triumphant, and a suffering Messiah; and surely Mahomet may be truly called the triumphant one, for he triumphed by the sword, as well as by arguments, over the religion established by the other, and subdued many nations which supported it. What think you, Dr. Warton, of this impromptu theory of mine?"

"I will not condemn it," I said, "because it is an impromptu, although I am in the habit of admiring the slow-grown fruits of meditation more than the hasty births of a random thought; but it is plain that your theory does not accord with Mr. Harrison's conditions, much less with all the conditions which might have been justly proposed.

Mahomet was no Jew himself, and never claimed to be the Messiah of the Jews, and set up no pretence to miraculous powers, and propagated a religion which had many human probabilities in its favor, although in its establishment it was still wonderful enough, I allow. Then, as to the two Messiahs, that is a mere invention of the Jews to palliate their infidelity. The triumphant and the suffering Messiah are one and the same person, and never before were such opposite and even contradictory characters united together in so extraordinary a manner. None but a prophet could have conceived any thing like it—at least none who wished to draw a character to agree with nature; and a prophet only could foreknow that a person fulfilling such a character, in all its parts, would hereafter exist. And, on the other hand, this strangeness of the character made it the more difficult, nay, made it impossible, I might say, for an impostor to claim it with success. A man cannot at will both triumph and suffer, as the prophecies portray the fortunes of the Messiah; and accordingly we find, that all but one, who claimed that illustrious title, suffered, indeed, in some sense or other, but never triumphed in any sense. They suffered, I say; for in general they were discomfited and slain: but they did not suffer as the blessed Jesus suffered, and as Isaiah, in his



fifty-third chapter, foretold that he would suffer. Without doubt, Mr. Langstone, you have read that memorable chapter, which, beyond all the other prophecies, had such a surprising effect upon Lord Rochester, and which, I should think, would convince any man who had not resolvedly shut himself up against all conviction, and barred and barricadoed up the avenues by which conviction might gain an entrance into his understanding and affections. Here is a prophecy too, which must be granted to be clear enough, after the event; and the more obscure it might be before the event, so much the more wonderful is it, and with so much the more force does it extort conviction from us. For it was obscure only because it spoke of one who was to suffer, not for himself but for others, painfully, ignominiously, and fatally, and yet to rise triumphantly over those sufferings, and to be prosperous and a glorious conqueror; and to found a peculiar and mighty kingdom, which should endure through all ages. The imagination of the poet, glancing from probable to improbable, from possible to impossible, had never pictured to itself any thing half so heterogeneous; but the prophet, inspired with a divine spirit, sketched an outline which our crucified Redeemer and Lord fulfilled to a tittle. The study of this converted the Earl of Rochester;



let Mr. Langstone study it, and he will be converted too, if he be made of human stuff, however firm that stuff may be."

Being warmed with my subject, I could not sufficiently mark the effect which this speech produced, and an accident prevented me, at that moment, from ascertaining it by any thing which they might have been disposed to say in answer to me. My eye, indeed, being fixed upon Mr. Langstone during the latter part of my speech, it did not escape me that he betrayed considerable uneasiness; but, Mrs. Harrison coming in upon the instant, all our attention was immediately directed towards her, and in a few minutes afterwards, as soon as it was decent, Mr. Langstone proposed to go. However, Mr. Compton would not permit it, but said, "Sister, do take the trouble to order up something to eat, for we are all hungry, I dare say, with talking; and Langstone with riding and talking too."

At once the bell was rung, the directions were given, Mr. Langstone's horses were quietly put up in the stable, and a cold collation was set out by the side of Mr. Compton's sofa. We all now sat down to it, and the debate, fresh as it was, seemed to be entirely forgotten.

Whilst we were eating, nothing of any consequence occurred; but scarcely had we ceased,

when Mrs. Harrison, who was anxious, no doubt, as usual, about her brother, and curious to know what had passed in conversation between us, and alarmed, perhaps, as to the effect of Mr. Langstone's visit, (for she was well acquainted with his character,) addressed her brother thus :

" You were all hungry with talking, you said, my dear brother : pray what was the subject upon which you talked so much ?—I fear I have lost a great deal of information by my absence."

" Perhaps so," he replied ; " the subject at least would have pleased you : we were talking about the prophecies—whether they were clear, or obscure, or what they were ; and Dr. Warton has stated to us, very justly, I think, that upon the supposition of their being genuine, a mixture of clearness and obscurity was essentially necessary."

" Yes," I said, " speaking generally, and with respect to one whole large class of the prophecies ; for, besides the reasons which I have yet assigned for the expediency, and indeed necessity, of a certain degree of obscurity, the Jews, being under a preparatory dispensation, which was to last till it had performed its object, and till the world was ripe for Christianity, which was to be erected upon its foundations, could not be permitted to see clearly to the end of that dispensation, under

which they were still to live for so many ages, and thus, perhaps, to compel the Deity to accomplish his designs by violence, rather than by the natural operations of the free will of men. But there are other prophecies which needed no previous obscurity; and, in point of fact, they were as clear beforehand as they were afterwards; only that there was a sort of condition annexed to them, and by the terms which they were expressed, it seems as if they might be fulfilled, or not, according to circumstances. The prophetic threats of punishment upon the Jews are a splendid instance of this. It depended upon their own conduct whether those threats should be executed or not; but the threats themselves were perfectly clear, and awful has been their accomplishment. Who can resist so irresistible an evidence? When you see a Jew, you see a miracle—a perpetual, standing, daily miracle—to prove the truth of Christianity. For it was the rejection of *Him* who was to resemble Moses and promulgate a new covenant—and whom they were commanded by Moses to obey, under pain of the most terrible chastisements—it was the rejection and crucifixion of *Him* which was followed, with no tardy step, by those very chastisements themselves. Astonishing, indeed, they might seem beforehand, and very reluctant, no doubt, would the Jews be to

admit that God would so utterly cast off his people; but the threatenings have been executed, in their clear, plain sense, to the very letter, and in every tittle. So, then, such prophecies were clear as might properly be clear, and such were obscure as ought to be obscure; but the event has made them all equally clear, or at least sufficiently clear to those who have eyes, and are willing to see with them. In truth, this is a tremendous consideration—that God will judicially inflict blindness upon those who are not willing to see, and so suffer them to delude themselves to their own destruction.”

The solemnity with which I delivered this scriptural warning appeared to impose a temporary silence upon them all. Mr. Langstone seemed, besides, to be repressed by the presence of a virtuous woman, and no longer disposed to be flip-pant or dogmatical. At length Mr. Compton said, that the prophecies deserved, undoubtedly, to be well weighed; and that there was an extraordinary character about them, both of matter and of style.

“Nor do I think,” he added, “that their obscurity resembles the obscurity of the heathen oracles, which were often so constructed as to be capable of being accomplished in opposite ways.”

“No,” I said; “we never meet with any thing like that given to Cræsus—that if he cross-

ed the Halys, he would destroy a great kingdom, which would have been equally fulfilled by defeat or victory. In short, the object was totally different, and they do not admit of comparison in any respect. The fulfilment of an insulated heathen oracle proved only the dexterity of *him* who framed it; but the fulfilment of scripture-prophecy, which is one great, connected system, reaching through many ages, and pointing to one vast object, worthy of the divine care and mercy, proves infinite wisdom, and the interference of God himself. It was well said, therefore, that if men will not believe Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe, though one rise from the dead."

Here Mr. Langstone was tempted to interpose, and he exclaimed rather eagerly, "Let *me* have the latter evidence, however, Dr. Warton: if one rose from the dead, *that* would be an evidence indeed;—the most determined sceptic, a very Academic philosopher, could not argue against it. But it never happens; the stories of such things are the mere fables of superstitious old women, or of men who are like them, too absurd to be credited for an instant. And I must say (this he spoke with an affected gravity,) that it appears to *me* to be rather singular, that an evidence, the most convincing of all, should be denied to us; this looks very odd, and is quite unaccountable."

There was a malice in this observation, which, I presume, was so ill-concealed as to be visible to all. Without noticing it, however, in an open manner, I said,

“Well, Mr. Langstone, but how is this? Do you really mean to assert that no one ever rose from the dead to prove to us the truth of Christianity?”

The form of this question occasioned him to hesitate a little before he answered it; but soon, with almost his usual boldness, he replied,

“There is no such thing; I have examined all the accounts of apparitions and ghosts, and such trash, not excepting the famous tale of the Cock-lane ghost; and I pronounce them all to be the tricks of impostors, or the dreams of dotards.”

“But there is one account,” I resumed coolly, “which is better authenticated than the rest.”

“What is that?” he inquired hastily and incredulously.

“Jesus Christ,” I answered, “was sent, first from heaven to persuade us, and when that was not sufficient, he was sent to us afterwards from the dead. Here is the very evidence which you prize so highly—unique, and incontrovertible—superior to all the cavilling of an Academic himself. What do you object to this, Mr. Langstone?”

At first he was somewhat disconcerted, but,



after revolving the matter in his thoughts a moment or two, he exclaimed, "No, no, Dr. Warton; that will never do; that is begging the question. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the supposed facts of the gospel, and can never be adduced to prove the gospel itself. No, no; what I require is, the return from the dead of some one whom we know, to assure us that there is an existence after this, and that all which the gospels tell us about a future state of rewards and punishments is true."

"And must this appearance of one from the dead," I inquired, "be vouchsafed to every individual person, or how?" He saw the absurdity into which he was ready to fall; so he replied cautiously,

"No, no, not to every single human being; for that would be endless; but to various persons at various times."

"Very well," I said, "and how then were the rest of mankind to be convinced? Must they be content with an inferior evidence, or what?"

This pressed him hardly, and he was compelled, after much hesitation, to confess, that they must needs take it upon testimony.

"If, then, we are reduced," I said, "to such a necessity, that an infinite number of persons must be content with the testimony of witnesses to cer-



tain facts, why may we not all of us be satisfied, and once for all, with the testimony of witnesses to the one great fact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead? Nor is there any begging of the question in my way of stating the argument. Jesus, when alive, preached certain doctrines; they to whom he preached would not believe; he came to them again from the dead, to confirm those doctrines by so supernatural a fact. This is what I understand you to insist upon. Now I also, from my pulpit, preach the doctrines of the gospel; you doubt about their truth, from the alleged insufficiency of the evidence; therefore, I come to you from the dead, to give you what you call the strongest and most irrefragable evidence of their truth; and in that case you profess at least that you would believe; but others, a great many others, must receive the matter on your single authority. I ask, then, whether it would not be better, and, therefore, wiser in the Deity, so to ordain it, that we should all of us acquiesce in the original evidence of the fact of Christ's resurrection, rather than that one age or community should trust to the evidence of one Mr. Langstone, and another to another, and succeeding ages or communities to succeeding Mr. Langstones for ever?"

It would have been so glaringly and ridiculously absurd to prefer this latter expedient, as a

general mode of proceeding, that even Mr. Langstone would not venture to argue it. A short pause therefore ensued, and I had an opportunity of looking round. A smile was playing upon the countenances of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison; if good manners would have permitted them, or the natural gravity of their own dispositions, they would probably have laughed outright. Mr. Compton, though ill at ease, absolutely did so; and at length exclaimed,

"This will not do, Langstone; we cannot maintain it; it has no solid base. Dr. Warton has touched it with his spear, and it crumbles to atoms."

"Yes," cried Mr. Langstone, somewhat petulantly, and manifestly vexed, that my authority should be set up above his own, by his quondam partner in profligacy and infidelity, "but the pretended fact of the resurrection of Jesus is so remote—so lost in distant antiquity—who but the most credulous will believe it now? Is not the strength of the testimony of witnesses diminished in proportion to the number of the links in the chain through which it is derived?"

"Then," I said, "at a certain period it would amount to nothing. For, being continually lessened, it must at length become less than the least which can be assigned, and which in practice is

nought. Thus all our belief of ancient facts would be completely destroyed, and history unavailable to the improvement of mankind. This cannot be ; your argument, Mr. Langstone, applies, not to testimony in general, but to oral tradition in particular. *That*, indeed, is weakened, as you say, every day ; and the facts only so reported are very soon utterly forgotten. But written memorials stand upon a different footing, and if their authority was good at first, it is good for ever afterwards ; and perhaps increased, instead of diminished, by the lapse of time, in consequence of a thousand circumstances which may arise collaterally to strengthen it. But the original authority will be better and better, in proportion as they who record the facts were nearer and nearer to the occurrence of the facts themselves, and had superior means of information. By this canon, therefore, the authority of the four gospels can scarcely be exceeded in weight. Matthew and John were absolutely eye-witnesses. Mark was probably the same ; but at all events he was the constant companion of one who certainly was. And Luke shall speak for himself." Then suddenly rising from my seat at the table, I seized a Bible, which I had espied with pleasure, upon my first entrance, lying upon a small table in a corner of the room, and returning with equal speed, and opening at St. Luke's

gospel, I read aloud the four introductory verses, and immediately afterwards resumed the argument.

“ You observe,” I said, “ what St. Luke asserts—namely, that he had a perfect understanding of all things from the first. Upon the whole, therefore, the testimony of these four Evangelists is the very best that can possibly be had; and it is confirmed in every way by every thing else which bears upon it; it stands unimpeached and unimpeachable. Your sceptics and freethinkers, indeed, may set it aside at once, and without examination, by a single *ipse dixit*, or stroke of the pen; but it must be allowed, I think, that their authority, under such circumstances, is less than nothing—on the negative side of the line of zero; much less to be put into the balance against the mighty, overwhelming authority of men of all ages, prodigious in talent, in learning, in virtue—the splendid luminaries of their respective generations; men, too, who probed this very testimony to the bottom, were satisfied with it, and fastened their faith and hopes upon it. In comparison with this, the other kicks the beam.”

Mr. Langstone and Mr. Compton not seeming disposed to say any thing in answer to me, Mr. Harrison, to carry on the discussion, inquired whether it was clearly made out by the learned,

that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, were really the authors of the gospels ascribed to them; and whether those gospels had come down to us in a pure, unadulterated form.

"It happens," he said, "that I have not examined this question for myself, but have hitherto taken it upon trust; I should like to know, therefore, something more positive about it; and it is of importance in the present stage of our debate."

"Yes, certainly," cried Mr. Langstone, eager to second any thing which implied a doubt about the foundations of Christianity; "unless this can be made out to our perfect satisfaction, the resurrection, and every other fact, fall to the ground at once. How is this, Dr. Warton? There are plenty of gospels, besides these four, which you are pleased to call forgeries; but wherefore? Why may not these be the forgeries, and those others genuine? Or rather, are they not all forgeries. There are enough, I believe, of absurdities, and inconsistencies, and contradictions, in them all, to overturn them all. Pray explain this, Dr. Warton."

"Fie, fie, Mr. Langstone," I said; "why set me to do a thing for you, which you may do so easily for yourself, any fine morning that you will? There is Lardner, for instance; he wrote upon this subject in about a dozen paltry octavo

volumes ; and what are they to your freethinker, who is always indefatigable in his investigations, and cannot sleep, unless he has dived to the very bottom of things, and solved every difficulty ? Besides, these octavos are so charming, that you will wish them to be folios ; or perhaps they will tempt you, for the sake of becoming a perfect master of this question, to betake yourself to the real folios themselves—a hundred or more, I warrant you ; the old Fathers, I mean, without whose help you must be content, after all, to go upon trust, or to grope in the dark. Well, all these have been conned over, again and again, by men skilful in the ancient languages, beginning their researches with the apostolic ages, and carrying them down through several of the early centuries ; and thus, after the most laborious industry, and the maturest deliberation, and the most scrutinizing criticism, and an illustrious display of all the powers and resources of the most gigantic learning, was the canon of scripture settled. But Mr. Langstone will unsettle it at once, and without any trouble, by a mere query—‘ may not the four gospels be forgeries ? ’ I will ask *you*, Mr. Harrison, can any thing more be done that has not been done towards the complete disposing of this question ? ”

“ It seems impossible,” answered Mr. Harrison. “ Every production of antiquity bearing

upon these gospels has, you say, been thoroughly sifted."

"It has," I rejoined, "and many more than now exist."

"Any man, then," he said, "who should attempt to go through the inquiry again, would have smaller means of settling the question."

"Yes," I replied, "smaller, certainly, but amply sufficient to satisfy the most scrupulous mind, and to occupy the longest life."

"And the epitome of the whole investigation is to be found in Lardner; is it not?" he inquired.

"It is," I said.

"Then I will look into him," he continued, "just to acquaint myself with the mode of the investigation."

"You will do well," I said; "but almost any of the books, much shorter ones, upon the canon of Scripture, would, I think, serve your purpose, although, in saying this, I would not be supposed to discourage larger inquiries. And as to the other point which you started, the purity of Scripture, it need only be mentioned, to satisfy any ingenuous person, that since the invention of printing, the wilful corruption of the text has been impossible; and that before, the power of comparing manuscripts with each other, and with the translations of them into different languages, and



the vigilant, mutual watch of contending sects, made it extremely difficult to alter or interpolate any thing without immediate detection. In short, every thing of that sort, which was either attempted or accomplished, and every variety of reading, which has ever existed in any manuscript, are perfectly well known to the critics, and actually appear, for the general inspection, in the great and elaborate editions of the Scriptures. What more, then, can you now at this day expect, or could you ever have?"

"Nothing, certainly," replied Mr. Harrison; "and I must say for myself, with the most unfeigned pleasure, that I am entirely at ease upon the subject. I thank you, Dr. Warton, a thousand times."

"Very well, then," I said; "if these collateral questions are thought to be sufficiently settled, we come back to the original one with the more decided certainty; and we cannot but acknowledge, not only that the fact of Christ's resurrection, attested by such witnesses as we have described, is a more forcible and convincing evidence of the truth of Christianity, than the appearance of one from the dead to different persons at different times, but also than such an appearance to every individual of every time."

"*That* is a strong assertion, indeed, Dr. Warton," said Mr. Compton; "I was disposed to go

with you before, but I cannot now. So far I am well aware, that the appearance of one from the dead to every individual is by no means to be expected as a general system. As Langstone very truly said, it would be endless. I am aware, also, from what has passed between us in conversation, that it may not suit the purposes of the Deity to afford us all universally the best evidence which may be possible; but that he may wish to try our tempers and dispositions, whether we will believe upon sufficient evidence; upon the same evidence that we believe other facts of importance to us. One thing more I willingly concede, that the humor or caprice of particular persons is not to be indulged, as a matter of course, with that evidence, which may either really be, or which they themselves may choose to call, the strongest. But, then, I should still think with Langstone, that the appearance of one from the dead, theoretically speaking, is such an evidence as it would be impossible to controvert; and, although you see that I do not go his length in pronouncing it *singular* and *odd*, that this especial evidence is denied us, yet I cannot but regret the total want of it in every case, and upon every occasion whatever. These are my sentiments, Dr. War-ton, which I hope I have made intelligible; but I will not shut my ears against conviction."

I could with difficulty restrain my joy, when I heard this speech. It delighted me in every way. It was full of candor, and visibly bespoke a surprising change of opinion and feeling. But what pleased me most was the desire, which I thought I saw in it, of carrying Mr. Langstone with him through all the consequences which might ensue to himself. There was an evident management in what he said, with a view to his friend, of some sort or other. I interpreted it in the view which I have mentioned, and hailed it as the harbinger of certain good. At the same time he had mistaken my position. I had contrasted the general evidence of Christ's resurrection with a general system of appearances from the dead; but he contrasted it with particular appearances to particular persons, now and then, upon extraordinary occasions, and, as it seemed, for their own conviction alone. In my way of putting it, it struck me then, that a general system of appearance to every individual of every time would come to nothing, and be a waste of miraculous interferences; and I think the same now. But *his* position was exceedingly plausible and well worthy of consideration; and it seemed besides to be of great consequence to me to overthrow it, if I could. I knew, upon the whole, that it was wrong; but I by no means knew whether I should be able to prove it

to be so to his satisfaction. Were this done, the result might be, not only that he would look solely, and as a matter of necessity, to those great universal evidences which God has provided for the whole race of mankind, but also that he would abandon altogether the vain notion, which he now entertained, of the certainty or even probability that a particular appearance would be useful to himself.

“ Well, then,” I said, after a short pause, and without taking any notice of the variation which he had introduced, “ We will see about it. But it will be of no avail to argue it as a naked, abstract, theoretical question, whether this or that evidence is the strongest. We will take it up practically, and as Scripture puts it: ‘ If they believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they believe, although one rose from the dead.’ It is supposed, therefore, that all the other evidence has been already examined, and rejected as insufficient ; and the question is, whether the same persons, who have done this, are likely to be convinced by the apparition of one sent to them from the grave. Our Lord said they were not ; at least he has so represented it in his most interesting and instructive parable of Dives and Lazarus.”

“ Yes,” exclaimed Mr. Langstone, with vehe-

mence, and interrupting me; "but his own history, which you call authentic, is against him. For it is there stated, that one of his own disciples, who had seen all his miracles, and had been told beforehand, that after death he would rise again; and was now told, that he was actually risen, and that he had appeared to those very persons who mentioned the fact to him; could not, however, be prevailed upon to yield to any testimony, or to any evidence, but to that of his own eyes; and the story goes on to say, that this evidence was given to him, and that he believed in consequence of it. This, I think, is what you have already alluded to, Dr. Warton; and you insinuated that the case of this doubting disciple, who afterwards believed, because he saw, was a case without merit; so I suppose, the greater a man's credulity, the more orthodox and the more meritorious his faith. But without stopping to show the absurdity of this, or to remark upon the inconsistencies of your Scriptures; what I quote the story for is by way of an *argumentum ad hominem* to yourself, Dr. Warton. You, at least, must allow, that here was a man, whom nothing else convinced, convinced by an apparition; and why should you pronounce the same thing improbable now? I protest, I do not see how I could resist that evidence myself. But there is

no danger of such a trial. What is there to re-appear? The bodies of the dead crumble into dust, as we all know; and the spirits which animated them, vanishing together, will never again disturb others, nor be disturbed themselves.

Death is the end of them for ever."

Perhaps the design of this open denial of the immortality of the soul was to lead me away from the subject in hand to a new topic. I, however, chose not to enter this new track, but proceeded thus:

"You say you could not resist the evidence of an apparition from the dead yourself, but how would you know whether your supposed apparition of a dead man from the other world was real? How will you know whether it be a true ghost, or the mere empty illusion of a dream?"

"Oh! pardon me, Dr. Warton," he replied hastily, "I have nothing to do with dreams. To be influenced by dreams is the very height of folly and weakness; that is not my failing. I must be wide awake, or the ghost will do nothing with *me*."

"So you shall then," I said, "but many men dream, do they not, even when awake?"

"Why, that is true enough," he answered sarcastically; "the dreams of waking superstition are endless, and most absurd."

"Be it so," I said. "It is not unlikely that

you are acquainted, as I am, with persons who affirm, without the slightest doubt upon the subject in their own minds, and apparently beyond the possibility of being convinced to the contrary, that they have seen with their open eyes the strangest visions imaginable, which you know immediately by internal evidence to be false."

"I have certainly met with more than one person of that description in the course of my life," he replied.

"But I presume you did not believe their stories," I said.

"No, indeed," he answered; "I laughed at their absurdity and nonsense."

"Should you have expected them to believe *you*," I asked, "if you had related similar stories of yourself to *them*?"

"Nor that either," he replied, "unless they were infatuated."

"Well, then," I asked again, "and would you not try to account for the mistakes of those deluded people, by saying that they must certainly have been dreaming in their sleep, although they thought themselves wide awake? Or, if they were really awake, yet that their fancies were still but a dream? Their agitated minds, perhaps, were dwelling perpetually upon some peculiar notions, until they embodied them into shapes, which



danced before their eyes with all the semblance of realities. Would you not explain the matter in one or other of these ways?"

He granted that he should.

"And all sober-minded persons," I said, "would explain in the same way, would they not, any similar supernatural visions which you might tell them had occurred to yourself?"

He allowed it.

"Very well, then," I said, "this being universally the case, however we might at first have been convinced of the reality of these visions, and obstinately bent upon believing them, should we not at length begin to distrust ourselves? One man laughs and ridicules us, another argues and disputes with us, a third accounts ingeniously for our delusions. Can we stand out against all this for ever? Will not our own belief be gradually weakened, and at last extinguished?"

"It seems likely enough," he answered, "speaking generally; but if I were the person, as I am pretty confident that I shall always be master of my own senses, I think I could distinguish sufficiently by the circumstances whether the vision were a true one or not; a ghost, suppose, or only a phantom of the brain."

"A ghost would probably speak to you, would it not?" I inquired.

"I presume so," he replied; "for, if it had any rational object, the object must be explained by words."

"Undoubtedly," I said, "and the words spoken might be an excellent clue to direct you in forming your judgment about the ghost itself, whether it were a true or a false apparition, whether it came from God or from the devil; might they not?"

"Possibly they might," he answered.

"You being always in possession of your sober senses," I said, "if the ghost were to utter something amazingly nonsensical, would you not pronounce at once that it was a false ghost, although you might be broad awake?"

"I would certainly," he replied, laughing.

"And," I said, "if it ordered you to do something which would drive you out of society, and disgrace your name for ever, would you not pronounce it to be a false ghost; or, if it were a real one, that it came from the Father of lies and all mischief?"

"If there were any such being," he answered dubiously, "I might, perhaps, say so."

"Well," I continued, "and suppose the ghost, resembling a dead person of your acquaintance, who disbelieved the immortality of the soul, should address you in this manner, 'Mr. Langstone!' he comes upon a grave errand, and therefore we

must make him speak with a correspondent becoming gravity; 'Mr. Langstone.' Probably, indeed, to rivet your attention to him, he will repeat your name three times, in the true ghost-like style, and with a hollow sepulchral tone, 'Mr. Langstone,—Mr. Langstone,—Mr. Langstone.' "

Mr. and Mrs. Harrison, with all their sense of dignity and good manners, could hardly restrain a laugh. Mr. Compton, without any scruple, laughed aloud. Mr. Langstone himself, bit his lips for vexation. It was quite a novelty to him to be the object of raillery; being like *Æsop*, *derisor aliorum, non ipse deridendus*.\* So he jumped up from his chair, and exclaimed, angrily, that he would be gone, if we wished to do any thing else but to argue.

"Nay, nay," said Mr. Compton, pacifying him; "this is Dr. Warton's good-humored, facetious way of putting his supposition; you have had your own jokes, without any obstruction whatever; and therefore you are bound by the law of reciprocity, not to spoil his wit by interrupting him. No, no, Langstone; sit down again; I am all impatience to hear the ghost's speech."

This did not much mend the matter; however, he resumed his seat; because, I believe, he would

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\* Accustomed to laugh at others, not to be laughed at himself.

have found it a very awkward thing to walk across the room to the door with the laugh against him.

"Well, then," I began again, "if Mr. Langstone does not admire this solemn exordium, perhaps he would as little admire the body of the speech, and still less the peroration; so I will put it all in one word. The ghost comes to assure you, Mr. Langstone, that you have an immortal soul."

"Does he indeed?" exclaimed Mr. Langstone, irritated, and starting up once more; "then I will not believe him." He uttered this in a most determined tone, but sat down again.

"I thought so," I said quietly; "but pray tell me, were there not persons before the Christian era, who reasoned themselves into a belief of the immortality of the soul." He could not deny it. "And is not the immortality of the soul," I asked again, "one of the doctrines of Christianity?" It was impossible for him to say otherwise. "And which is most easy to believe," I asked thirdly, "the whole of Christianity, or this one doctrine which is a part of it?"

This question he refused to answer, and crying out petulantly, that he was wearied with answering question after question to no purpose, he desired me to answer it myself according to my own pleasure.

"I will then," I said, "and the obvious answer is, that it is easier to believe a part than the whole, which necessarily embraces the part and other things. And now we may draw the conclusion from these premises, which is equally obvious, namely, that Mr. Langstone would not believe in the Christian religion, although one rose from the dead."

Upon this, not being able to endure his unpleasant situation any longer, he got up in good earnest, and, as he took leave of Mr. Compton and the rest of us, he endeavored to conceal his chagrin with a laugh, and said, "Very well; as Dr. Warton has now settled the matter to his satisfaction, I may be excused; so good morning to you all."

This he accompanied with a very low, affected bow. Mr. Compton called out that he should wait till his horses were ready, and at the same time desired his sister to ring the bell. This she did, but Mr. Langstone was gone, and no sooner was the door shut after him, than she exclaimed, "Oh! my dear brother, I am so glad that he has left us! I can now breathe again with freedom."

"Yes," said Mr. Harrison, "and with all his positive, dictatorial temper, and with all his fluency and impetuosity of speech, he is so shallow too. He really never seems to me to penetrate

beneath the surface, or to see to the end of any thing, so that it is no wonder that he is entangled and confuted immediately."

Then, thinking, perhaps, that what he had said was not complimentary to *me*, he added instantly, "At the same time, Dr. Warton, I am fully aware, and acknowledge with gratitude, the admirable manner in which you conducted the whole conversation. Indeed, if it might not look like flattery, I should express in very strong terms my great surprise at the readiness and facility with which you meet and overthrow every position adverse to Christianity."

"It is true," interposed Mr. Compton; "you put me in mind, Dr. Warton, of the ingenious description of the Dialectic and Rhetoric, and I perceive that you can contend in the manner of both. Your short, pithy, pungent, home-thrust questions, are the hand with the fingers closed—the fist, as we call it; and your lengthened disputations, whether in attack or defence, whether to explain or to illustrate, are the hand with all its fingers expanded and apart."

I was by no means displeased with these commendations, although not entitled to so large a measure. If their opinion of me had been but a low one, I should scarcely have been able to effect any thing important, especially with such



a man as Mr. Compton, with whom authority went a great way. I thought it right, however, to put the matter on its true footing; so I said, "Oh! spare me, gentlemen! There is nothing at all really surprising in what I do! If you recollect that these are the subjects upon which I am constantly reading, and thinking, and talking, and writing, and preaching, all your wonder will cease in a moment. But to have done with this, I wish to know, with regard to the last point that we were upon when Mr. Langstone deserted us, whether you still think that any thing would be gained by appearances from the dead?"

"I am not quite satisfied about it," he answered "The argument terminated too abruptly for me."

"So far I presume you see," I said, "that there would be a difficulty in deciding whether it were a true appearance or an illusion, and if a true one, whether it came for a good or for a bad purpose. 'Then it must be supposed, (indeed we assumed it,) that if it were a true one, and came for a good purpose, it would be to persuade us of something against which we were so strongly prejudiced as to have rejected the suitable evidence of it. Immediately, therefore, I have no doubt, we should be up in arms against the poor ghost; we should be disposed to pronounce the whole thing a fancy of the brain, or perhaps the pious fraud of



some officious friend to cheat us into Christianity, or a change of life, or what not? Let it be granted, however, that, in spite of all such endeavors to escape from the impression of the reality of the ghost, the impression will still cling to us and haunt us, and we consult, in our distress, such a man as Mr. Langstone, a man of the same principles, pursuits, and prejudices as ourselves. Oh! what a battery would be opened upon us of argument and raillery! What laughs, what jokes, what jeers, what sarcasms, would not be launched against us! what appeals would not be made to our consistency, to our courage, to our pride! In short, he must be an extraordinary man, I think, who should obey the ghost against his own inclinations, and in despite of all the ridicule that would be heaped upon him. You remember, no doubt, the story of Lord Lyttleton's ghost, and the attempt to divert his mind from the thoughts of the death that was foreboded, by putting the clock forward to the fatal hour. It struck; and, at once released from all his fears, he exclaimed in a transport of joy, 'I have cheated the ghost!' This illustrates what has been said; and, upon the whole, it appears to *me* that a maxim, which we might well have admitted on our Lord's authority alone, is now sufficiently proved by reason and by fact; namely, that they who do not believe

Moses and the prophets, will not believe although one rose from the dead."

"In truth it seems so," said Mr. Compton, "and, therefore, we will finish the discussion here. I am sure we have detained you unmercifully, Dr. Warton. I expected to have talked upon other subjects; but Langstone led us to the prophecies, and then to this idle speculation about ghosts. However, it has been useful to me, very useful."

"I am glad of it," I said, as I got up to go, "and we shall have time, I hope, for the other subjects, with God's leave."

"I hope so," he replied, and reached out his hand, which having pressed, I left him.

AFTER this long conversation, a week elapsed before I saw Mr. Compton again. Mr. Harrison was with me on the following day, to report the satisfactory progress which appeared to have been made, and to entreat me to pursue my own good work, whenever I could spare time for it from my other employments. I was as willing to do this as he could possibly wish, and I was particularly encouraged to proceed by a circumstance which he mentioned to me. Mr. Compton, it seems, had written to Mr. Langstone, without the least delay, and whilst the subject was fresh in his mind, in

such a manner, and in such terms, as to prove, at least, his own sincerity, whatever effect might be produced upon his friend. This letter Mr. Compton had shown to his sister, and she was highly delighted with it. Amongst other things, it reminded Mr. Langstone with what facility all the opinions which he had advanced had been overthrown; and it took occasion from thence to insinuate the probability that every other opinion of his, inimical to the Christian religion, might be overthrown with equal facility. For, in fact, these opinions had been taken up on bad authority, as Mr. Compton too well knew by his own sad experience; and, therefore, he exhorted his friend to substitute, as he himself was about to do, for Bolingbroke, and Voltaire, and Hume, and Gibbon, the writers of a better school.

Well, I arranged with Mr. Harrison to be at Mr. Compton's the next day; but before the appointed hour arrived, I was stopped by a message, which informed me that Mr. Compton had been seized during the night with another attack of paralysis; from which, however, it was thought by the medical men, that he would certainly recover, and it was therefore recommended to me to await the result. I did so, and, at length, after the interval which I have already mentioned, the disease having abated, and Mr. Compton himself having

expressed a great desire to see me, I lost no time in going to him. I expected to find a great alteration in him in every way. This second seizure by the same disorder would convince him, I supposed, that he could not be much longer an inhabitant of this world; and that it was necessary for him, therefore, to set seriously to work to prepare himself for the next. At all events, I was now determined to let him know the worst.

I was received by Mr. Harrison, who conducted me immediately up stairs, and tapped gently at Mr. Compton's door. Mrs. Harrison was within; and I understood that this was a concerted signal for her to dismiss the attendants by another door, and to admit *me* alone. However, I found nobody in the room but herself and the sick man.

He was sitting in his bed, supported by pillows, so as to be nearly upright. With his right hand, the only one not paralysed, he held up a pocket-handkerchief to the left side of his face, to conceal, as I thought, the distortion of it. Fortunately, I was prepared beforehand to expect to see some derangement of his natural features, which is always an affecting spectacle; but he was probably not aware that I knew of it, and so tried to hide it; yet he might be sure that it would not escape my observation, if I continued with him many minutes. Ah! I said to myself, he still clings to

the world, and to outward appearances, and is not sensible of their vanity.

As I approached the bed, his lips quivered, and tears started from his eyes, and all that I saw of his countenance betrayed great agitation and uneasiness of mind. It was pale, as from loss of appetite, unquiet rest, and mental trouble. His sister wept in silence. My sympathy was awakened, but I could do nothing to console him. I could not grasp his hand without disturbing and perhaps distressing him; to speak was not at present within my power. After the first piteous glance, however, when he ceased to look at me, I became gradually re-assured, and at length began the conversation in the following manner:—

“I am sorry, Sir, very sorry, to see you in so much affliction.”

“I knew you would be,” he said immediately, interrupting me, and expressing himself with tolerable firmness, and without any hesitation or indistinctness of speech, which I was glad to observe.

“Yes,” I resumed, “it is a painful thing to see any person in pain and distress. We cannot conquer that feeling at once; no, nor at all. Perhaps it does us honor. Yet the slightest reflection teaches us that these evils of sickness and calamity are calculated and intended to produce good. As I walked towards your house, I watched some large,

dark, black clouds, which were suspended in the air over my head, and threatened every moment a tempestuous downfall. On a sudden, the sun, which was behind one of them, shot his beams obliquely on the rest, and immediately all their skirts and edges were lit up with a golden light. The thought struck me in an instant, that this was applicable to your case, Mr. Compton. Your sufferings have been long and great, after an uninterrupted enjoyment of health and worldly prosperity. The cloud that still hangs over you is large, and dark, and black enough."

"It is indeed," he said.

"Yes," I resumed again; "but it is bordered by a robe of glorious light; nay, the light breaks through it in every direction. The design, and the use of your calamities, are as manifest as the calamities themselves, and the mercy of God shines out in the midst of them with a visible lustre. What were you, I ask, six months ago? What are you, I ask, now? You have yourself, indeed, already told me what your former life has been, and how conscious you were that it was totally at variance with revelation. But it was contrary to reason too, the only remaining guide. At least it could not be the proper life of a man destined to immortality; *that* is as clear as the sun at noon-day. No; and I will go further; it could not be



the proper life of a man doomed to terminate his existence in this world. They, who would shamelessly maintain such a position, are but little removed from the brute beast. In fact, they put themselves voluntarily upon a level with him, and so they say, as he might, if he were endued with speech, 'Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die,' and our existence is at an end for ever. What! Is this the language and the sentiment of a *man*? Of a being, whether immortal or not, yet gifted with the highest powers of reason and imagination; capable certainly of the greatest actions, and the noblest aspirations? No, no; a rational creature must acknowledge that he ought to be governed by reason in all circumstances alike, whether death terminate his whole existence or not. Such a life, therefore, as is led by loose men of the world, cannot be justified upon any supposition."

Thus I was running on, and seemed almost to have forgotten my main point; but here the sick man exclaimed with earnestness, and dropped his hand from his face, "It is too true, Sir; I see it now, and I wonder it so long escaped me. But what am I at this moment, that I should feel more comfortable with myself?"

"You are come to yourself," I said, "which is a mighty change. This sickness, ordained in



mercy, snapped your mistaken habits and your erroneous career asunder. It compelled you to reflect: it brought home to you the conviction, that your life hung upon a thread, at the will of another; it forced upon you the thought of an hereafter, into which you might be plunged in a single instant, unawares, and unprepared; you looked round for support against this tremendous idea; you remodelled your family, upon virtuous principles; you came to God's house of prayer; you searched the holy Scriptures; you inquired into the evidences of Christianity. Am I not right in calling this a mighty change? Six month ago did this seem possible? Could it have happened without adversity? If God himself had not touched the hard rock, these waters of sorrow would never have flowed: he deserves your love, therefore, for he has first loved *you*; and this correction is the proof of his love."

"Would that it might be so," he said; "but, without doubt, if there be a God, he is necessarily endued with all perfection; and in whatever he does, he will seek the glory of his own nature, and not the gratification of any temporary passion. Nor will he ever exercise one attribute to the exclusion of another; except, perhaps, justice, when he has tried mercy in vain. And this is the thought which still alarms me, lest, in my own

case, he has inflicted these calamities upon me judicially, and with no view to any further mercy."

"The great scene of God's justice," I replied, "will be the next world. In this world, whilst we continue in it, our trial and probation will also continue; and consequently, until the very moment of our departure from it, we are capable of amendment. I speak generally; I do not mean to assert that God never inflicts punishment judicially in this world. On the contrary, we sometimes see men struck down in the midst of their vices, without any possibility of profiting by the blow. *That*, perhaps, may be called a judicial punishment; but I myself believe, that even such persons are snatched away in mercy; in mercy to others, that so signal an interference of Providence may operate as a warning; and in mercy to themselves, because God foresees, that, if their lives were prolonged, they would abuse the indulgence, and pluck down upon themselves a heavier damnation."

He shuddered at the word with which I concluded my sentence; but before I could proceed, he inquired despondingly, whether it were not probable, both from reason and Scripture, that God had appointed a term, or limit, beyond which all the avenues to mercy are closed against us.

"Is not God himself," he said, "represented in one of the Psalms, as swearing in his wrath,

that certain men should never enter into his rest?"

"He is," I answered. "The denunciation is addressed to the Jews in the wilderness, and regards the temporal possession of the promised land of Canaan. It has nothing to do with their final salvation; although, indeed, it might be reasonably feared, that the same crimes which rendered them unworthy of a temporal rest in Canaan, might render them unworthy also of an eternal rest in heaven. But then there is this hope on the other hand, that so striking a punishment as that of shutting them up in a barren desert, till they were all cut off by death, might have filled many of them with deep contrition and remorse, and so they might have done what they could, and the best which they knew, individually, if not nationally, to reconcile themselves to their offended God. This, however, could not reverse the temporal sentence; but it might affect the final one. St. Paul undoubtedly applies this text to all Christians; and, therefore, in their case, rest can only mean the eternal rest in heaven, which is prepared for the righteous. And how does the apostle intend to admonish us? Why, that as God excluded the Jews from Canaan on account of their sins, so will he also exclude unrighteous Christians from heaven, of which Canaan was the

type. This being the case, therefore, and life being uncertain, he further admonishes us to cast out betimes the evil heart of unbelief, and not to prolong the day of our repentance, but to seize upon the present moment, which alone is in our own power; and it is implied that the present moment is always in our power. We know nothing therefore of any period of God's mercy, or of any condition of sinners, after which he will no longer strive with them, but withdraw his holy spirit altogether. If there be such a period and such a condition, yet he has nowhere revealed them, and therefore it is impossible for us, and foolish, to conjecture about them. But one thing is certain, that they, from whom the Spirit is withdrawn, will plunge deeper and deeper into sin, if they are permitted to live. Every thought of theirs will be evil continually. You may use this test, therefore, for yourself; and you may derive from it the mighty comfort of being assured, that, if there be any such fatal limit, *you* have not yet passed it; on the contrary, that you have receded from it. So wonderful has been the divine goodness towards you, that you have been able to retrace some of your steps; and, I doubt not, the same goodness is now waiting upon you to be still further gracious. You have reason for hope, but none for despair!"

"Ah!" said the sick man mournfully; "but

may not my case be like the case of Esau, who found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears? Such, I think, are the words of St. Paul. I met with them this very morning, and they have made a painful impression upon my spirits." Upon saying this, he wept aloud as Esau had done, and his sister withdrew from the bedside to hide her grief.

"You have mistaken this text," I replied immediately, "you have mistaken it entirely. I will explain it presently." Then I followed Mrs. Harrison to the window, and recommended to her to retire into the adjoining room to compose herself. She was aware, I believe, that I might have some particular wish for her absence, and so she obeyed at once, telling me that, if I wanted her, she should be within the hearing of my voice.

This being arranged, I returned to my post, and sat down on a chair, close by the side of the sick-bed. In a moment Mr. Compton exclaimed, "Oh! what an excellent woman is my sister, Dr. Warton! How kind and tender-hearted! When I think of her as a wife, too, I see and deplore my own loss. The great error of my life strikes me the more forcibly, and under my present circumstances adds a poignancy to my feelings which is acute and piercing indeed! Ah! Dr. Warton, I too might have had such a wife, perhaps, to watch

over me with affectionate care and anxiety in my distress; and children to surround my bed, and lament their father. Oh! what folly, what madness—it touches me now, it sinks to my very heart! You do not know enough of my case, Dr. Warton, to see the astonishing folly and madness of it.”

Here his sobs interrupted him, and he did indeed exemplify the history of Esau. No tears or sobs could now recover the blessing which he had sacrificed for the sake of a present indulgence. It was gone, irreparably, for ever! I pitied him; but still, as I doubted whether he had any conception of the guilt as well as the folly and madness of the sin to which he had alluded, I thought it would be unseasonable to attempt as yet to soothe his sorrow; so remembering those beautiful lines of Milton upon wedded love and indiscriminate sensuality, I repeated them to him, and afterwards some others, which are put in the angel's mouth to reprove Adam for the undue and passionate expressions which he used in speaking of his connubial happiness. It occurred to me that I might thus, perhaps, gradually prepare him for another and more essential view of his condition.

“You have admired, no doubt, before,” I said, “but now you feel to your very inmost sense, my good sir, what the divine poet says:



"Hail, wedded love, mysterious law, true source  
Of human offspring—  
By thee adulterous lust was driven from men  
Among the bestial herds to range; by thee,  
Founded, in reason, loyal, just, and pure,  
Relations dear, and all the charities  
Of father, son, and brother first were known.  
Perpetual fountain of domestic sweets,  
Whose bed is undefiled—  
Here Love his golden shafts employs, here lights  
His constant lamp, and waves his purple wings,  
Reigns here and revels; not in the bought smile  
Of harlots, loveless, joyless, unendear'd,  
Casual fruition——"

"Yes, yes," cried out the sick man, "I see now my error and calamity, and my degradation too. It is true enough, promiscuous lusts befits only the bestial herds. It is impure, irrational, unjust, and faithless. Guilt and shame only are its offspring.

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed, "I despise myself now thoroughly; it is base, and below a man. This is my deliberate judgment, Dr. Warton, not as you might think, the constrained profession of one cut off for ever from every enjoyment. My misery, indeed, has brought me first to the knowledge of it, but thanks to my misery for disclosing this knowledge to me, and for leading me to view my conduct in its true light, as it really is abstractedly in itself, ugly and hideous."

"Aye," I said, "and if it be ugly and hideous



in your own eyes, what must it be in the eyes of God, Mr. Compton?"

"Detestable, sir, and abominable!" he answered, in an instant, and with an unusual fervor.

"Ah! Dr. Warton, I have argued, (but I will argue so no more,) I have argued at the midnight ball of harlots, and when ill-disguised under the wanton mask, that the gratification of those brutal passions is not criminal; that Nature herself bids us reach forth our hands, and taste the fruits of pleasure which she has liberally provided for us; and that none but the morose cynic, the stern lawgiver, and the pensioned preacher, would endeavor to counteract her simple dictates. I tremble when I reflect that such false and hollow arguments have too often succeeded; but the promised fruits have turned out to be gall and wormwood in the end, if not to the actual taste. Such they are now to *me*."

"Yes, indeed," I rejoined, "it is very likely, and I am glad, for your own sake, that it is so. But how shall the evils done to society, to families, and to individuals, by such reasonings, and by actions correspondent to such reasonings, how, I say, shall those evils be repaired? We ourselves, by God's wonderful mercy, are spared perhaps to see the horror of our own principles and

conduct, and to repent from the very heart ; but who knows this, of all the numbers that may have been corrupted by our example ? How few are they who have the opportunity of being improved by our recantation ? Like waves upon the agitated surface of a pool of water, which spreads around in wider and wider circles, so does the evil of our bad example diffuse itself daily and hourly, and we have no longer any control over it. Nor does it cease to operate through the medium of others even when we die. In truth, it still proceeds when we ourselves lie mouldering in our graves, and the accumulated sum, no doubt, will be charged in part to us hereafter. We cannot reckon it up in imagination even, and we shall be amazed when it stands in array against us ; but God has noted it in his book, from time to time, and there it must remain, if God so choose, unobliterated till the final account."

Mr. Compton was deeply touched with this picture of the evil done to society by a bad example ; and I might have been disposed to stop, but recollecting how salutary his grief might be to him, I went on almost immediately in the same strain.

"Think also," I said, "of the misery brought upon private families, and upon the poor victim herself ! Brought up in innocence, we have rob-

bed her of that jewel. The delight and the stay of her parents, we have spoiled them of their chief comfort and support, and have brought down their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Having sacrificed herself to our seductive flatteries, we have cast her off to scorn and a deeper profligacy, when we have satiated ourselves with her violated and ruined beauty. We have done this perhaps, and without remorse we have hunted out fresh victims, with a similar result. But what will they say to us when we all stand together before the last, unerring, impartial, inflexible tribunal? Will not the parents demand their daughter of us, pure and innocent as they would have always wished her to be? Will not she herself exclaim, pointing at us with an extreme anguish, 'There are they who polluted my body and soul with sin;' and will she not without ceasing invoke almighty vengeance upon our heads?"

My own feelings were so much awakened by these representations, that I paused for a little relief; and then, turning towards the sick man, from whom I had studiously averted my countenance during this latter speech, that I might express myself with the greater energy, I observed that his face was covered with his handkerchief, and that he was sinking upon his pillows. With-

out delay I rang a bell, which was upon a table near me, and immediately Mrs. Harrison entered by one door, and a nurse by the other.

"Mr. Compton seems faint," I exclaimed; so they flew to his help, and some hartshorn having been administered, he soon showed symptoms of recovery. However, Mrs. Harrison beckoned me to withdraw, and I went accordingly into the adjoining room, where I found Mr. Harrison in some anxiety.

"There is no danger," I said, "Mr. Compton is getting better again. He would have fainted, perhaps, if the hartshorn had not instantly relieved him."

"I was afraid," replied Mr. Harrison, "of another paralytic attack."

"No," I rejoined, "there was nothing of that sort. He was over affected, I believe, with the picture which I drew of the results of vicious indulgence;" and then I related the substance of what had passed between us.

"Aye, aye, indeed," cried Mr. Harrison, "there is no wonder that he vibrated to that chord. Your supposition was no supposition to him; facts, facts, Dr. Warton, now speak home to him as loud as thunder. A dark stain, I fear, will rest upon his memory; and it will require floods of tears to wash out his own guilt. I am glad

that you have probed this wound, and that he has himself shown so much sorrow."

"I knew nothing," I said, "of any particular story; but I had a general notion what the habits of his life had been, and it seems likely now that he will never have any other means of showing the sincerity of his repentance but by the abundance of his grief. Therefore, I tried to awaken him by pretending to arraign him at the bar above. But pray, Sir, go into the chamber, and bring me word again how matters proceed; and whether he will bear to see me once more. To leave him thus would be unsatisfactory."

Mr. Harrison went as I desired, and soon returned with a request from Mr. Compton, that I would come back to him. I did so, and found him as at the first; his sister supporting him, and the nurse having disappeared. Immediately he said, "Dr. Warton, you have compelled me to abhor myself, and to tremble still more than ever for my future lot. A fortnight ago my heart was stubborn and obdurate, and sorrow for sin could not obtain admission there. It was in my head, but it did not reach my heart. Now, indeed, it is no longer speculative but practical. Yet there is no merit in it to avail me any thing. Here I am, my strength is laid in the dust, my nearest friends can scarcely recognize my features,

another blow and I am gone. What is now, then, the value of all my past pleasures? The memory only remains, and the memory is a scorpion! Sorrow, therefore, in my case, is a sort of necessary consequence: it is no virtue, it is not repentance, it is a punishment; for any good, it is like the tears of Esau, too late and unavailable."

The matter and the manner of this speech were pathetic in the extreme. Mrs. Harrison's tears, as she hung over her brother, dropped upon him. I bore up much better than I could have expected, and replied with sufficient firmness, "God forbid that we should attempt to limit his mercy! His invitations to repentance are full and universal, without qualifications and without bounds, and the examples of forgiveness are co-extensive. The true penitent, the spirit which humbles itself under correction, may look upward and revive. You remind me of the text about Esau. I told you before that you misconstrued it, and so in truth you do. Esau profanely despised the blessing of his birthright, and sold it to another. It is said, therefore, in our translation, (but the translation is inaccurate,) that he found no place of repentance, although he sought it carefully with tears. The real meaning is, that, with all his tears, flowing as they did from his heart, he could not change the mind and determination



of his father. His father had spoken prophetically by the impulse of the Holy Spirit. He could not repent or retract what he had said. The blessing was immutably attached to Jacob. But though of a spiritual character, it was still but a temporal blessing, and the loss of it did not doom Esau of necessity to an eternal condemnation. Yet the story is a lesson and admonition to *us*, with respect to the great spiritual blessings reserved for us in heaven. If we make light of them, and barter them away for the present sinful indulgences, it is very true God will place them beyond our reach, and we ourselves shall be found amongst those who will weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth in vain. All this, as you say, will be our punishment. It will work no change, no repentance, in the great ruler of the world. Our trial will be over, because our life will be over also. But whilst there is life, there is hope."

Here I paused, and Mr. Compton, too, was silent,—ruminating deeply, as it appeared, upon the argument suggested to him. At length I resumed—

"Yes, I say, whilst our life is prolonged, there is hope of our salvation: unless, indeed, we have apostatized from the faith of the gospel; unless we have denied the great Redeemer who bought us; unless we account the blood of his



covenant profane and useless. If this were so, then, it is true, to whatever extent our life might be prolonged, and however sincere and afflicting our repentance, there would be no hope for us. No repentance built upon foundations of our own invention, upon human reason or natural light, none, in short, but that which rests in Jesus Christ, and in *him* crucified, will arrest the decree which our sins provoke. God the Father will not be approached but through God the Son. There is but one mediator between God and man, capable of adjusting the differences between them; namely, the God-man, one who partook of the nature of both, and was therefore qualified to transact for both; one who was commissioned by God the Father, and to be accepted with submissive gratitude by *us*; one who might not only intercede for us by supplication and prayer, as mere man could do, but plead for us in the fullness of his Godhead, and say, ‘I have paid down the whole stipulated ransom for sinners; I have exemplified, by my sufferings, the divine severity against sin, and have satisfied all his demands; I have sealed and ratified the promise of forgiveness with my own blood: be it now fulfilled; accept, for my sake, almighty Father, accept the sacrifices of a troubled spirit, in which thy nature delights; despise not the sighings of a broken and contrite

heart, which ascend to thee in my name. I am in *thee*, and thou art in *me*; and let every poor penitent upon earth be one with *us*.' ”

I was not able, nor, had I been able, should I have been disposed to attempt to add any thing to this. Nor was it necessary. In a moment, in an ecstasy of feeling, the sick man exclaimed, reaching forth his hand in haste, which I grasped with equal eagerness, “ Ah! I believe, Dr. Warton; I believe—and may God strengthen my belief! But pray for me, pray for me, I beseech you!”

The tears burst into my eyes, but immediately I loosed his hand, and was upon my knees. Mrs. Harrison, with her face covered, did the same. In this situation, before any thing was said, Mr. Harrison came in, impatient at our absence, and was soon, without uttering a word, in the same posture with the rest of us. Then bethinking myself in what I might be most likely not to fail, and what might also fit for the present circumstances, I drew my prayer-book from my pocket, and opening at the Communion-service, I read the penitential psalm, with some omissions and alterations, afterwards the longer prayer in the same service, then the Lord's prayer, and lastly, the benediction of St. Paul.

So I rose, and wished to be gone; neither

caring to have my own feelings observed, nor to observe the feelings of others. But Mr. Compton arrested my step, and inquired if he might be permitted to receive the Sacrament. "Yes," I answered, "when you will." "To-morrow, then," he said, "at this time, let it be." "It shall," I replied, "if God will;" and then I hastened away. Mrs. Harrison remained unmoved in the same attitude of prayer, and her face hid; Mr. Harrison followed me to the door, and there he pressed my hand, but could not articulate a sentence. Thus closed this interesting, this consolatory scene; and thus, I silently prayed, may God often bless and reward the feeble endeavors of his appointed servants!

Before the day was over, a note arrived from Mrs. Harrison, to apologize for having permitted me to depart without her thanks. Her sensations, she said, were so complicated, that she could not describe them, and unhappily they had deprived her for many minutes of all power of attending to proprieties of behavior. But she knew that I did not look for any such poor recompense as that of ceremonious, or even of real gratitude. What would be my fullest and most delightful recompense I already had; namely, the certain consciousness, that her beloved, but unfortunate brother, was fast acquiring, by my means, the temper

and disposition of a Christian. So she expressed herself. The next day I kept my appointment. The due preparations had been made for the administration of the Sacrament in the sick-chamber; but the intended communicants were not assembled. Mr. Compton was placed as yesterday, and I saw distinctly that his features were much restored towards their natural appearance. On the whole, he pronounced himself better in every way. There were with him Mr. Harrison and a nurse; but as the rest appeared to be slow in coming, he motioned the nurse away, and began to converse with me on one of those subjects which now chiefly occupied his serious thoughts.

"I have been meditating, Dr. Warton," he said, "upon the holiness of God. It is a sublime, and a fearful speculation."

"It is," I replied. "We may get some notions of it by metaphysical reasonings; but those notions will be astonishingly enlarged and elevated by Scripture. The descriptions of it there are magnificent in the extreme, and, of course, when we compare ourselves with such a standard, we shrink back with awe and alarm. When we are told, that the Heavens themselves are not clean in God's sight; that he charges even his angels with folly; that the very purest spirits which encircle his throne veil their faces with their wings, and

cannot behold the dazzling purity of their Maker—we have an apt image of *him* whose name is Holy; whom the cherubim and seraphim incessantly laud and magnify in their songs with the preamble of Holy, Holy, Holy; and the rest of whose perfections, however ineffable and inconceivable, are so much eclipsed by this, that it is on the throne of his holiness that he delights to sit—in his holiness he speaks—by his holiness he swears. But then, as you say, the idea is the more terrific, when we reflect upon ourselves, and conclude, as we must of necessity, that such a Being is of purer eyes than to tolerate the sight of any, the least stain of iniquity in his rational creatures.”

“It is too true,” he said; “and, therefore, whoever wrote that particular Psalm, it was a proper reflection of the author, that if God should be extreme to mark what is done amiss, we could none of us abide it.”

“No, indeed,” I answered; “the very purest actions of the very best of human beings would be but splendid sins in his estimation; they would look only like failings white-washed over, in comparison with his holiness. The eye of the world might see no flaw in them; the eye of the doer himself, turned inwards, but purblind with self-love, might discover no blot; but every flaw, and

every blot, stands out and glares in the perfect mirror of the divine excellence. If the mixed motives of men were analyzed, there would be found lurking amongst them too much of human frailty—too much desire of vain glory, to corrupt what otherwise might have been sound and untainted; so that their actions will never endure the scrutiny of an infinite holiness. If this be so, then, what are we to think when we come to facts? What becomes of our arrogant assumptions, when we recollect, that the great mass of us do not merely fall short of being blameless, but are absolutely sinners? Nor is this the whole of our case. Everything proceeding from an impure fountain must be impure itself. This is our misfortune. There is an original uncleanness about us, which the Holy One cannot behold with complacency; and which, when it has shown itself in the production of its proper fruits of actual sin, he must, of necessity, hate and loathe. Where are we now, then, and what shall we do? Shall we dare, with this gross, tainted flesh about us, to approach *him*, a pure spirit, that inhabiteth eternity—that dwelleth in the high and holy place?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Compton, "I understand it now. We cannot treat with *him*, nor *he* with *us*. We want somebody to smooth and facilitate the approaches for us; somebody, call him what



you will, to mediate between the two parties ; to intercede in behalf of the inferior, and to advocate a cause which would otherwise be hopeless."

"True," I said, delighted that he had solved the difficulty himself ; "this seems a simple proposition ; but who is there, in the whole universe of things, equal to such a task ? Who is there with authority to undertake it,—with love enough for mankind, in their fallen, corrupt, and ruined state, to desire their recovery from it, and to labor for their restoration ?"

"I presume," he replied immediately, "that if men had been left to themselves, they could not have found anybody. How, indeed, should they set about it at all ? How could they be brought to concur in one person ; and how could they know that God would accept his office ? Indeed, they were dreadfully ignorant about God himself. The probability is, therefore, that they would never once have thought of such a matter."

"Oh ! pardon me," I said, "they were always thinking about it. A mediator may well be called the desire of all nations. The want of this was the prolific cause of all those inferior deities and innumerable sacrifices amongst the heathens. These were intended to approximate them to the great Being, the universal Lord of all. Every nation had its peculiar mediator ; nay, almost



every individual; as the Papists, absurdly now, have each their patron-saint. But one man, at least, in the whole world, was wise enough to see the folly of such a system—I mean Socrates—who said that men would never have any certainty with respect to this great want, until some one should be sent down from heaven to teach them."

"Yes," replied Mr. Compton, "there he was undoubtedly right. It is manifest, for many cogent reasons, that the first proposition must come from above."

"Clearly," I said, delighted again that he had himself suggested such a thought; "if men had been better acquainted with God than they really were, yet it must have been left to *him*, as the Sovereign, to declare, whether he would pardon sinners on any conditions; and if so, then on what conditions; and whom he would ordain to the important office of making those conditions known, and of carrying them into effect."

"This is quite reasonable," he answered; "and so far the Scripture-scheme agrees with the conclusions of our reason. But now explain to me, if it be possible, why so exalted a person as the Son of God is chosen to this office. Here I have great difficulties. I admit and believe the fact; but I cannot understand the cause."

"There is no need," I said; "but still a very

satisfactory cause may be assigned. Are you aware, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was the great Agent in the creation of all things?"

"I was always aware," he replied, "that it was supposed to be so stated in Scripture; and I knew of the famous text, in the beginning of John, which is generally adduced to prove it. But I confess the whole thing appeared to me so incredible, that I never examined the question for myself. Supposing it, however, to be so, how does his being the Creator account for all the rest?"

"You shall hear what I think about it presently," I said; "but first it may be useful to you, if I were to repeat the splendid passage of St. Paul in his Epistle to the Colossians. After calling Jesus Christ the image of the invisible God, he goes on in this manner: 'By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible, and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.' This is sublime, it must be allowed; but is it not also full enough, and plain enough, to satisfy the most scrupulous, who admit the Scriptures at least, that Christ made the worlds and man?"

"Without all doubt," he answered.

"Well, then," I said, "now hear the sequel;

‘ This same is the head of the body, the Church, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell ; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself.’ ”

“ A most striking passage, indeed ! ” exclaimed Mr. Compton. “ It asserts or implies, I think, every office that divines ascribe to Christ.”

“ It does,” I said, “ and, what is more, it connects them together. But tell me ; have not they, who make things, generally the most care concerning them ? ”

“ So it should seem probable,” he replied.

“ And if the thing made,” I said, “ were so wonderful, so excellent, so noble a creature as man, do you suppose that the Maker would care the less about him, or the more, in proportion to the distinguished blessings and qualities which he bestowed upon him ? ”

“ The more, certainly,” he answered.

“ Do parents,” I asked, “ appear to you to care what becomes of their children ? ”

“ Intensely,” he replied.

“ And the more intensely, perhaps,” I said, “ the more perfect and excellent they themselves, the parents, are ? ”

“ I should imagine so,” was his answer.

"And if their children fall into danger or distress," I inquired, "do not the bowels of their parents absolutely yearn over them; and are not all their affections and powers let loose at once, whether to pity, to succor, or to restore them?"

"No doubt of it," was his reply.

"Well, then," I said, "Christ made man; and how divine the work was, we know by the ruins of it which remain, although so dreadfully defaced. What wonder, then, that he should compassionate the workmanship of his own hands, so noble a creature fallen from the high estate in which his bounty had placed him, and in danger of an eternal misery? Could he look on and not be moved? Could he be moved, and not attempt to save his own offspring? Could he suffer the most glorious part of his dominion to be lost, without wishing and endeavoring to recover it? Hence, then, he becomes, he who was the Creator, becomes, reasonably and naturally, the Mediator, the Intercessor, the Advocate, the Redeemer, the Savior of mankind. Who so likely, who so proper, to undertake and fulfil all these offices for them, as he who made them at the first, and has preserved them ever since by his providence? And observe, the same person shall at last be our Judge. Well, therefore, may they, who accept him under all those offices, anticipate mercy, and

they, who despise or reject him, judgment without mercy."

Mr. Compton trembled, but made no answer; and at this instant his sister entered, with several servants, and inquired if I would permit them to partake of the Lord's Supper in company with their master.

"By all means," I answered, "It is a very favorable opportunity. They have been for a long time the inmates of a sick house: this, I should expect, must have awakened in their minds serious thoughts with regard to themselves. We are none of us sure at any time beyond the single pulse which beats; but the constant sight of a death-bed prevents us from disguising this fact from ourselves, and urges us forcibly to prepare for that destiny which awaits us all. However, they must ask themselves this question, before I put it to them in the course of the solemn service; whether they are at peace with their fellow-men, as they would be at peace with their God; and whether they grieve for their past sins, and hate them so far as to resolve henceforth, to the best of their power, to walk in newness of life."

"I have examined them, Sir," said Mr. Harrison, "as to all these points, and their answers are very satisfactory."

"Very well, then," I replied; "they may par-

take of this private Sacrament ; but I advise them to receive the Sacrament publicly in the church, upon the first occasion that offers, and, indeed, to establish themselves in the regular practice of it. God loves the celebration of his ordinances in the appointed places ; but where it cannot be done, as in the case before us, we trust that he will graciously accept the will for the deed."

After this I administered the holy rite ; and a remarkable circumstance occurred, which at first alarmed me, as being a deviation from strict order ; but it appeared to produce a good effect, and therefore I did not interrupt it. When I presented the wine to the sick man, he held the cup in his hand for a few moments, and then addressed the other communicants as follows :—

" I am glad to see so many of you present, upon an occasion which is deeply awful to myself, and may be very useful to *you*. The greater part of you know only my calamities ; there are but two who have been long enough in my service to be personally acquainted with the habits of my former life, before I was roused from my security by this severe but merciful blow. I intreat them to pardon me for the bad example which I have set them ; and I hope, that both they, and the rest of you, will all be admonished to your profit by so sad a spectacle. I have sinned—I



confess it—basely and heinously; I have done deeds——”

We were waiting in breathless expectation for the conclusion of the sentence. He began it with energy; but the recollection, I presume, of the deeds themselves—black, no doubt, and corroding the conscience—suddenly oppressed his voice, and denied utterance to any thing but sighs. In an instant, every eye that was upon him shed tears of sympathy. At length he was aware of it, and by a great effort resumed his speech.

“I will not wound your feelings, nor waste your time, by a particular enumeration of my sins, or by aggravating the enormity of them. I will reserve that duty for my own conscience, for the great God above, and for the minister of Christ, if he require it of me. But, believe me, amongst the various errors and sins of my life, I am most deeply sorry for my neglect of this holy sacrament.\* I have partaken of it but twice only; once very properly, but, alas! without any due effect. It was by the side of my excellent mo-

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\* In the church of England the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered to all who are willing to receive it, and it is *required* as a preliminary step to entering upon the duties of any office under government. Hence the rite is regarded very differently from what it is in this country, as will be seen by the conversation which follows.

ther's death bed. Would that I had obeyed all her counsels, which her departed goodness and wisdom should have sanctified to my ears! Perhaps she observes me now from her sainted sphere, and——"

Here he stopped again in the bitterness of his soul. All our tears redoubled; his sister sobbed aloud; but soon once more he resumed, and finished. "The other occasion, upon which I took the Sacrament, was not a worthy one. It was a mere form, and to comply with the laws of my country, when I wished to become a magistrate. Perhaps she is wrong in imposing the necessity of so sacred and awful a ceremony; but at all events, I myself was wrong in taking the Sacrament with worldly views. It is not unlikely that my motives may be mistaken now. Some one may surmise, that I am constrained by the fear of death. The fear of death has been wholesome to me, I allow; and I thank God for giving me the two warnings which I have had. But I am under no apprehensions of immediate death. On the contrary, the doctors throw out hopes of life, and you yourselves see how much better I am to-day. I receive this Sacrament, therefore, deliberately, and not in haste; from conviction, not from alarm; with gratitude, and warmth of affection, not with a cold thanklessness; with hope, and not in de-

spair. I receive it, with a firm resolution to neglect it no more, and with a humble prayer that God may bless it to my present and everlasting welfare."

This being said, he emptied the cup, and returned it to me; so I performed what remained of the ceremony, and took my leave, expressing my wish aloud, that the sick man might be left as quiet as possible, to meditate upon the solemn scene which had just been acted, and to realize some of its immediate benefits. It was his own wish too, he said; so we all retired but a single nurse, who remained to watch over his solitude.

In the afternoon of the following day I visited Mr. Compton again. He had given directions, that if I called, I should be brought to his chamber at once. Mr. and Mrs. Harrison were with him there. He was well enough to have been lifted from his bed, and placed in a large easy chair, where he sat wrapt up in flannels, and supported with pillows. I should have inferred, from the more cheerful air and relaxation of his features, that he imagined the bitterness of death to be past; but to my first simple observation upon his improved appearance, he answered, immediately, shaking his head, and contracting his brow, "I have no dependance upon it whatever. I may live, certainly; but since my second attack, which

was almost as unexpected as the first, my expectations of life have been much diminished. The present calm does not deceive me. No, Dr. War-ton, it is not so much the freedom from pain, and the recovery of a little strength, and this change of situation and posture, which have improved my appearance; as the disburdening of my conscience, the practice of repentance, the belief of the Christian religion, the knowledge of some of the reasons upon which it is founded, and the partaking of the holy Sacrament yesterday. These are the several things, which, by their combined influence, have produced the effect which you perceive, and upon which you congratulate me. But even in these respects I have much to do; and I am well aware how humble I ought to be."

All this was admirable, and it was impossible not to be delighted with it. "Very well, then," I said, "you have now proved by your own experience, that the practice of repentance, so painful to the imagination, is not so painful in the act; or, at least, that it is attended at every step with the consolation, the comfort, and the revival of the broken spirit. It is not like the sorrow which ensues upon the loss of worldly things, and sinks the man down to the confines of the grave, having no support, and no hope; it is a sort of holy sorrow; it has a cleansing power derived from the

merits and promises of the Savior ; it restores the man to himself ; it settles him in a peace and tranquillity unknown before ; amidst storms and tempests without, it introduces a sunshine into his own breast ; it encourages him to repose on the Mediator, and to look up through *him* to a reconciled God. This is the process, Mr. Compton, through which you yourself have gone ; difficult and painful, and almost impossible, when contemplated from a distant point ; but satisfactory in every step, and most happy in the whole result."

" Yes, indeed," he replied, " and that the Sacrament has crowned the rest. In the way in which I have taken it, I consider myself as having acknowledged one main truth of Christianity, that Christ died for the sins of the world. I understand it to be a memorial of his death, through all ages ; and I understand the receiving of it to be a public testimony that we are in covenant with him. By baptism we entered into that covenant ; by this Sacrament, I presume, we keep up the recollection, and put in our claim to the benefit of it."

" You are quite right," I said ; " but, besides the general benefits of the Christian covenant, there are particular and immediate benefits, without doubt, arising to all who partake worthily. It is impossible to think, that Christ is himself pre-

sent in this Sacrament, without some peculiar blessing attending it."

"But how is that?" he inquired. "Is the presence of Christ any thing more than a strong figure for his influence and efficacy?"

"Yes," I said, "he is really present, but not bodily; neither by the conversion of the bread into his bodily substance, which is called transubstantiation, nor by the union of his body with the bread, which is called consubstantiation; his presence is after a spiritual manner."

"It seems, then," I continued, "that, besides, the general benefits to be expected from an obedience to the dying command of our Savior, and from so positive a profession, as we make at the altar, of devoting ourselves to his service, and from the sacred act of acknowledging the inestimable value of his death, and our trust in it as an atonement for sin, and for our own sins in particular; besides all this, there is something else, which is more, I think, than a mere figure; some invisible union, perhaps, which takes place between himself and us, to our sanctification; some seed, as it were, implanted within us, which tends thenceforward to the production of the rich fruits of righteousness and holiness of life. And this, I apprehend, is effected by the intervention of the Holy Ghost, whom I formerly represented to you as



bearing a most important part in the great business of our salvation. In fact, Scripture so states the matter, that without the help of the Holy Ghost we cannot take a single step towards that glorious end; and it is by this, his spirit, that Jesus Christ, as the God-man, is present, and acts everywhere. So far as his divine nature solely is concerned, he is every where, and at all times present personally, like God the Father; but in his mixed nature, by which he is chiefly related to *us*, he himself resides in heaven, at the right hand of the paternal majesty, and his spirit is his representative here upon earth."

"Would it not be a simpler and more intelligible notion," inquired Mr. Compton, "if we were to consider the Holy Ghost as a quality rather than a distinct person, or as the spirit of God, in the same manner that the soul is the spirit of man?"

"It is purely a matter of revelation," I answered, "and therefore we must take it precisely as it is revealed. But we should gain nothing in point of intelligibleness by the notions which you suggest, and we should lose in other respects. If the Holy Ghost were to God what the soul is to man, we must change all our plainest ideas of God himself, whom we suppose to be one pure, unmixed, and unmodified spirit; and, if he were merely a quality, how could he act at all? No,



nothing can be clearer than that the Comforter, as Christ calls him, is a person distinct from the Father and the Son, but so connected with them as to proceed from both. The origin of the Son, we are told, is by some mode of generation totally unknown, and inconceivable by us; yet such, no doubt, as to occasion that peculiar relation which is expressed by Father and Son. Of the origin of the Holy Ghost we know nothing; except that, whatever may be meant by his proceeding from the other two, it was from all eternity. And this circumstance of his being eternal, together with the other things ascribed to him in Scripture, compel us to make him a partaker of the Godhead. The work assigned to him in promoting our sanctification and salvation requires the powers of the Godhead, and therefore, it is of deep importance to us to know and believe that he has them. We rely upon him with an unshaken confidence, because we are assured that his power and inclination to save us are concurrent, and the same with those of the Father and the Son. And to obtain his mighty aid, we have only to pray for it and to use it. This is the practical part of the doctrine, which is open to the meanest understanding, and wants no metaphysical interpretation."

"Yes," said Mr. Compton, "I perceive all that very clearly. There is a simple mode of viewing

these matters, which is adapted to the general understanding and necessities of mankind; and there is another which may occupy the highest thoughts of the highest genius."

"So it is," I replied, "but, unfortunately, many men in different ages, have run wild in their high speculations, and thence arose the expediency of creeds to fix the boundaries of those speculations. The safe thing is, to adopt this rule of Scripture—'The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed, belong unto *us*, and our children for ever.'"

In this sentiment they all appeared to acquiesce, so, after a short pause, being desirous to go, I proposed that we should kneel down, and join together in a short prayer. This being readily assented to, I took the 103d Psalm for my basis, and altered, and added, as it suited my ideas of the present emergency. The effect, apparently, was such as I might have wished. I then pronounced the Lord's Prayer, and the benediction; which being finished, I rose and departed. Mr. and Mrs. Harrison would have accompanied me; but I did not permit them.

After the last conversation, I saw Mr. Compton several times, and talked with him as usual. His faith and repentance appeared to me to be both of them lively and sincere, and I was glad to per-

ceive no tendency whatever to fanaticism about him, either in his language or conduct. The language, indeed, of fanaticism, which betrays itself in an instant to those who know any thing of it, he had never learnt or heard, and it does not come naturally to any body. His conduct always discovered a proper self-humiliation, and a true distrust of himself. Because he had undergone an entire change of heart and sentiment, he did not, therefore, assure himself of his indefeasible salvation, or arrogantly assume that he was sealed for heaven. He looked back upon his past life, and was abased in his own eyes ; and he looked forward, not indeed without the hope of a modest diffidence, but still with much of its fear and trembling. Perfect love casteth out fear, and he was inclined to love with all his heart ; but he had yet had no experience in the ways of God ; his condition was but the beginning of wisdom, and, therefore, it was very properly accompanied with a wholesome fear. Of this feeling I greatly approved. I am shocked, and my blood almost runs cold within me, when I hear, as I too often do, of the greatest of sinners, with no time for solid repentance, quitting the world with all the religious assurance of the greatest of saints ; dying, in short, in the worst of causes, as if they died in the very best. Even the thief upon the cross was

humble, and acknowledged his own baseness. Never could I court the vain applause of having worked up the minds and imagination of the profligate to a feeling of security with respect to another world. It is a bad example for others, it is deeply hazardous for themselves. The conviction of the certainty of salvation, is not salvation itself, it may be a most dangerous downfall.

During this interval, Mr. Compton busied himself, I believe, in works of charity. He had been too selfish before, and had spent his whole income upon his private indulgences. Now he employed his sister to look for persons in distress, and to relieve them; and he subscribed liberally to all the benevolent institutions of the parish. But his career of doing good was short. One night, his female nurse only being in attendance upon him, came the third paralytic attack, which ended fatally.

I was sent for early in the morning. He was lying in his bed upon his back, with his eyes closed. Mr. and Mrs. Harrison were standing by; the former in deep thought, the latter in tears. I spoke—his lips moved, but he could not articulate any thing. I pressed his hand gently; he grasped mine with strength without loosing it. "It pleases God," I said aloud, "to preserve his understanding to him in this great extremity. Let

us seize the precious moment, and spend it in prayer." He understood me, and let go my hand. Immediately we were all upon our knees, and I read the prayer appointed for those who have small hope of recovery. When it was finished, I rose and took his hand again; and, putting my face close to his, I asked him if he had heard and comprehended me. I thought that he answered "yes," but he gave me a sufficient sign by pressing my hand with vigor, and still retaining it. I asked again if he was firm in the faith of Jesus Christ; again he pressed my hand, and then loosed it. I concluded that any more questions would only disturb his last moments, so I pronounced over him a benediction, and prepared to go. Indeed, I could do no more. Hesitating a little, at length I went without being noticed; Mr. and Mrs. Harrison still remaining upon their knees.

In three hours I returned, expecting to hear that all was over. He was alive, and I was desired to go up stairs. Very soon, as I mounted them, I heard a dreadful noise, of very hard breathing, which it is difficult to describe. I started at first, but finding it to be repeated at regular intervals, I too well understood what it was. The door into the sick-chamber, at the top of the staircase, was wide open. I passed rapidly by it, but I had a glimpse of the dying man as he lay in

the same position as before, with his nostrils distended, and his mouth gaping. Mr. and Mrs. Harrison were in the sitting-room. She was on her knees, and her husband was supporting her. The sight had been too appalling for them, and they had retired here.

I stepped softly into the adjoining chamber, but the rolling of thunder over our heads would not have awaked Mr. Compton now. I came to the side of his bed, knelt down, and performed, as well as I could, the painful duty of commending his departing spirit to the Savior's hands. The noise of his breathing was terrific; and every gasp seemed as if it would be the last. His mouth foamed, and his eyes were closed. I soon descended the stairs, but the terrible noise pursued me till the door was shut upon me. In imagination I heard it afterwards wherever I went during the day. The next morning I heard that the poor patient's sufferings were over.



### CHAPTER III.

#### THE SPIRIT OF INFIDELITY.

As I was presiding one night in the Select Vestry, I observed a poor woman, amongst many others, applying for Parochial relief. Her husband's sickness was the plea; and as we all knew that he was now grown old, and had seen better days, her request was granted without any opposition or difficulty whatever; and without putting any questions to her, which might have wounded her feelings under the circumstances of her distress. Five shillings, however, were all that were given at that time out of the rate for the poor; and I therefore determined to visit the sick man the following morning, to ascertain by inquiry upon the spot what was his real condition; to assist him, if necessary, out of my private charity funds; and more especially to discharge my spiritual functions for the good of his soul.

Indeed, I had no doubt, that this was the help of which he stood most in need. At church I had never seen him during the whole course of my ministry. Common fame reported him to be an Infidel, or even an Atheist. His habits had been



to live in the alehouse amongst the lowest company, whom he harangued against the government and against Christianity; and being much superior to those with whom he associated, and having also no small fluency of talking, he convinced and corrupted many of his hearers. In the mean time, having a little smattering of law, he pretended to give advice upon legal matters, and earned a penny now and then by setting his neighbors together by the ears. If letters or petitions were wanted, he was the man to write them for what he could get. He measured land also; and thus, by these various methods, picking up a scanty subsistence, and enjoying continued health, without the burden of a family, he had dragged on to the age of three score years and ten; and, as far as appeared, never once troubled himself with the thoughts of another world, which was to come hereafter, and to last for ever.

To myself, without knowing me personally, he was decidedly hostile. In his cups, as I was informed, he never ceased to abuse the Parson; and sometimes I was assailed by anonymous letters, which were suspected to come from his pen.

Such was the person, whom I proposed to visit, under the favorable circumstances of poverty and sickness, in the hope that I might take advantage of

them, and do something for his everlasting benefit. His house was at the distance of one mile and a half from mine; but upon inquiry I found that he had been compelled to quit it; that all his best furniture had been seized and sold to satisfy the demands of the landlord; and that he himself, unable to walk on account of his infirmities, had been carried out in a great chair to an obscure lodging in the neighborhood. All this betokened considerable distress, which was ordained, no doubt, by the good providence of God, to create serious reflection upon the past, and to awaken salutary ideas of futurity. Having received this information, my hopes were increased, that I might be a successful, although a humble instrument in God's hands, for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes of love and mercy.

In the cottage, where he had taken up his abode, there was a poor family living on the ground-floor; he himself and his wife occupying a single chamber above. The wife, having been called down to me below, immediately conducted me up to her husband. He was sitting in the great chair by the side of a small fire. His face, which I saw first, was red and bloated, and his eyes inflamed. His feet, legs, and thighs, were so much swelled, that the heels of his shoes were down, and the knees of his breeches unbuttoned. His

body too was of an enormous size, both because he was of a corpulent habit, and in consequence of the dropsy, under which he now manifestly labored. His waistcoat was open to avoid pressure. On his head he wore a red night-cap. Close by him was a table covered with the various drugs and fomentations which his disease required. The chamber was crowded with the wreck of his property; an old bed without curtains; some broken chairs; pots, kettles, jugs, and sundry other wares; all the worse for use.

The best chair that could be found was appropriated to me; which his wife first carefully dusted, and then placed in the most vacant spot. In the mean time she had already introduced me by name, but she did not seem to comprehend who I was; so I said, "I have been told, Sir, that you are not very fond of ministers, and I presume therefore you did not expect that a minister would come to see you; no, not even your own. But here I am; not deterred by general report; and my intention and desire is to do you all the good that may lie in my power."

"Oh!" he replied, "it is Dr. Warton, is it? I beg your pardon, Sir; I did not know you. Pray, sit down, Sir. I fear, Sir, you have got a wrong opinion of my character, for want of being better acquainted with me. I have a great many ene-

mies in the parish, and they have not scrupled to slander me to you."

"Well, well," I said, "let us talk and think no more of *that*; at all events, we will be friends now, if you will. And you may be perfectly sure, that, in thus visiting you, I can have no private interest of my own in view. Your welfare is my sole object."

To this he assented, and thanked me for my kindness towards him.

Having thus begun with tolerable good omens, I proceeded to inquire about his sickness, expressing my fears that it was both painful and dangerous. In answer, he was very communicative; and it appeared that his disorder was distressing in the extreme; a vast mass of water collecting perpetually, and discharging itself through every pore of his body; and his respiration being at times so much impeded, that he had scarcely breath enough to tell me his own story. He had been at the nearest hospital, in an early stage of his complaint, when it seemed to be within the reach of art; but had unwisely returned home, before the proper system was tried, because he was deprived of many little things which he considered essential to his comfort. Since this the disorder had increased rapidly; yet he would not admit any idea of danger. In fact, he was mani-

festly afraid to die. I put him in mind of his advanced age, and of the usually terrible effects of dropsy, which in his case were too evident even to myself. Still he was most reluctant to entertain a thought of death; and he proposed to me to obtain admission for him into another hospital at a greater distance, but where the medical attendants, as he flattered himself, were men of greater skill. I promised to do this, and named a day in the following week for his departure.

This being settled, I next asked him, as delicately as I could, what was the state of his pecuniary matters; insinuating gently, that I thought it possible, from what I had heard, and from what I now saw, he might want a little assistance, which I should be able and happy to give. On this point he was very reserved, and would not at all acknowledge his difficulties. Of course he was ignorant that I knew of his application to the parish; and I thought it might be very detrimental to the success of my other objects, if I then mentioned it to him; so I turned it off, by saying that I would talk that matter over with his wife, when I went away. I did so at the door, stating my surprise also that he should endeavor to conceal his circumstances from me. "Ah! Sir," she said, "pride, pride, is the cause. He has too high notions to confess his poverty; and yet, without

the relief which I had last night from the officers, we should have been in some danger of starving." I gave her what was necessary for the present, promising to add to it hereafter; and I thought with myself, that, possibly, his prejudices against me, not yet sufficiently softened down, having led him to consider me his enemy, he was unwilling to furnish me with that sort of triumph, which an enemy might have enjoyed in witnessing his destitute condition. Afterwards, when he knew me better, he had no false shame, or other difficulty about it; but received my offers readily and gratefully.

However, I was now to come to the most important subject, without being in possession of this great advantage; and I said, "Your worldly affairs, I fear, Sir, are in a very unprosperous state; and your body is certainly afflicted with a dreadful disease. What is there in your case to bear up your spirits under such an accumulation of calamity? Your mind, I hope, is not diseased, as well as your body."

"My mind," he replied, rather sternly, as disliking to be questioned, and yet by no means with the tone of a man really tranquil at heart, "my mind is quite at ease, Sir;" but his whole countenance and restless air showed that it was not so.

I saw it; but I said, "I wish indeed it were so; provided your tranquillity were founded on



solid grounds. To be called out of this world into eternity with an uneasy conscience, is most terrible; but it is equally unsafe to depart with false, delusive hopes. May I be permitted, therefore, to ask you, (as I am sure I ask only for your own good, and not out of an idle curiosity, or with any foolish desire of disputation, under such circumstances,) what those grounds are on which you rely?"

"I will tell you plainly," he answered; "if I die, of which, however, I do not see any present danger, I shall either be nothing at all, or I shall not be miserable. My conscience does not accuse me of any crime."

"It seems, then," I said, "that you think it possible that death may be followed by an entire annihilation; but also, on the other hand, thinking it possible, likewise, that there may be a future state, which will be a state of retribution, you have made due preparation for this latter alternative."

To this he answered, without hesitation, "I do not pretend to have made any other preparation, than by doing justice always to my neighbors."

"Alas! alas! Sir," I replied, "does not the experience of us all agree in this with Scripture, 'that there is not one just man upon earth, who doeth good and sinneth not?'"

He took up the word Scripture hastily, and said, "I have no objection, Sir, to talk with you;



but with what you call Scripture I have nothing to do. I put no faith in it. We do not want it. Let a man do his duty, and he has nothing to fear." This he spoke with a most decided air, and collecting all his breath to utter the sentiment. His vehemence, indeed, exhausted him; and he was compelled to pause before he could finish his sentence. It was too evident that *he wished* Christianity to be false.

I interposed with coolness; "But you will admit, I suppose, Sir, the *morality* of the gospel at least; and therefore, must consent to be tried by it, as the rule of your actions."

"I allow," he said, "the morality of the gospel to be excellent. But what is that to me?"

"It concerns you in this manner," I replied; "every man must be tried according to the best rule with which he is acquainted. If the morals of the gospel be the best that we know, which you seem to grant, we must be tried by those morals. You would not have a man, I presume, who knows a superior law, to be tried afterwards by an inferior one? Put the divine origin of the law for the present quite out of the question; and yet you see, that if your conscience tells you that one law exceeds another in perfection, it tells you, at the same time, that you must obey the better law, and that you will be judged by it."

He was apparently staggered and alarmed, looking as if he was afraid that he should be surprised into some conclusion, which he might not like; but I did not wish to profit by his temporary confusion, and so endeavor to push the argument further than it would reasonably go. I continued, therefore, in this manner:—"You tell me that your conscience accuses you of no crime; and that you have always done justice to your neighbor. But how has your conscience been enlightened? What notions have you formed of crimes, of justice, of your neighbor? He who would be most enlightened on these subjects, must study the gospel; and he who would discharge all his duties with propriety, to God and man, must make the gospel his model. This cannot be well denied. Have you, therefore, done this, which you are bound to do by natural reason? And if you have tried to do it, do you not perceive, instantly, your own deficiencies? When you compare your life with the perfect, holy, sublime law of the gospel, do you not see and acknowledge immediately, how far, how astonishingly far, you have come short of the glory of God? If I were to scrutinize your actions from your youth upwards, could you lay your hand upon your heart, and say, all these I have faithfully performed? Has the fear of God been constantly before your eyes? Have

you loved him with all the faculties of your heart and mind; and prayed to him for his blessings; and thanked him for every mercy, even when he afflicted you? What has been your conduct to your parents? Did you never wilfully disobey them, or create them any pain? How have you served your king and country? Have you never misrepresented his government and actions, so as to render others dissatisfied with them, and thus to become discontented subjects? Have you never spoken evil of dignities; which the gospel, consulting the peace and happiness of mankind, strictly forbids? Have you extended your ideas of neighborhood as the gospel directs you, so as to embrace within the compass of it, countryman and stranger, friend and enemy; and especially every child of sorrow? And then, have you been active in performing all the duties that spring from these wide relations? Have you loved your very enemies? Or have you indulged the sinful passions of hatred, envy, and malice, towards them? Have you ever taken vengeance into your own hands, and not left it to God? Lastly, have you never violated any of the pure laws of temperance, sobriety, and chastity; neither polluting yourself by sensual vices, nor ruining others by the act or by the example, from your youth up, until now?"

Thus I ran through, as rapidly as possible, the

whole summary of the moral duties ; not suffering him to interrupt me, which he attempted again and again, where he felt his conscience clear as to any particular charge ; but intending to overwhelm his self-sufficiency, by the very multiplicity and variety of the subjects for self-examination, which I poured out upon him altogether, in a mass. And then, I summed up the matter in a few words, saying, “ Is there now a single man in the world so little acquainted with himself, as to think, that when he stands face to face, before the great Judge, he might venture to plead, that he is guiltless in all these respects ; that he has perfectly corresponded to the designs of Providence in making him ; and that he is entitled to the infinite rewards of a future state ? On the contrary, would not the very best of men, who are always the most humble, cry out, ‘ we are sinners ; we will shut our mouths before God, or only ask for pardon ? ’ ”

I was myself visibly affected by my own arguments, and by the earnestness with which I had spoken ; but the sick man was little moved, outwardly, at least ; and at all events, he showed no disposition to concede any thing, but a determination to resist to the last extremity. For he said, “ If I am deficient in any thing, I owe it to my nature. God is the author of every man’s nature—

God implanted in us all our appetites and passions; and, therefore, if we follow the bent of them, he has no reason to be angry, and consequently will not punish us."

"You put yourself," I replied, "upon the same level with the brute beast, and forget that you have a rational part of your nature which the brute beast has not, and which raises you above him. And reason is so manifestly superior to every other part of your nature, that you may see at once, that it is not only fit, but intended by Providence, to govern the rest; that no injury may arise to the man himself, or to the community; and that the Creator may be glorified by the proper use of that pre-eminence which he has bestowed. If, therefore, we follow the bent of our appetites and passions, and suffer them to domineer over our reason, instead of being regulated by it, we have not done our duty; we have not acted correspondently to the capacities of our whole nature; we have dishonored our Maker; we deserve his wrath, and must expect to be punished.—Is not this so?"

"Suppose it were," he answered; "may we not be sorry for what has been done amiss; and correct our errors, if there be any; and amend our lives, if they require amendment; and will not this satisfy God, and avert his anger? Your own

gospel allows the efficacy of repentance, and recommends it."

"It does indeed," I said; "but only upon one condition; which condition implies, that you embrace the gospel as true, and believe and trust in it. Do this, and then repentance will be acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ."

"I cannot do it," was his answer. "Nature teaches repentance; and that is sufficient. I hold by nature."

"A bad support, it is to be feared," I said, "for any of us in our present circumstances. For what is to become of all the past? Will sorrow for it undo it? Will even the most complete change and reformation of life for the future, undo the past? And, if you are in the right way now, it is no more than what you ought to have been always; and cannot, therefore, excuse you for the time in which you went wrong. The God of nature requires a perfect obedience to his laws, in every period of your existence. You cannot make a bargain with him to be vicious in one period, and virtuous in another. It is plain, therefore, that even a sincere repentance can supply no solid ground of peace and security, without God's authority to that effect; and such an authority cannot be had without a revelation from heaven. And whose repentance was ever so sincere and



complete, as not to need a second repentance? In fact, is not the whole life of the generality of mankind, an alternation of sin and repentance, repentance and sin; until death overtakes them at last?"

He could not deny it; but still he persisted in saying, that, there were so many objections against Christianity, that he could not admit it, even with any advantage which it might offer to him. Upon this, I rose up, and took my departure; not being able to spare more time for conversation at present; but I besought him, as he valued eternity, to examine himself well, and not allow himself to be deceived in his dying hours. It was clear, that, whilst he could not pretend but that his opinions were shaken, and that he was absolutely beaten out of some of the common holds of infidelity, it had wrought no joy, but sorrow in his heart.

At my next visit I found him sitting on the bed-side. He was alarmingly worse; the other parts of his dress were the same as before; but he was without a coat; the disease had made such inroads upon every part of his body, that it did not seem possible for him to bear up against it much longer. His eyes were still more inflamed, yet glassy and dim. To my first questions about his present state of disease, he gave in answer, a

most piteous account of himself; no appetite, no rest, no power of breathing. All idea of the more distant hospital was quite abandoned. To convey him there alive appeared to be absolutely impossible; yet he flattered himself, that he might rally sufficiently to go to the nearer hospital where he had been before. He was evidently more than ever afraid to die, whilst the last thread was about to snap asunder, and to plunge him into eternity.

Anxious for his eternal welfare, I now said, "It is my painful duty to tell you, Sir, that your life is in imminent danger—God only knows how short the remnant of it may be! Your disorder is most certainly advancing with rapid strides, and your doctors declare that nothing can be done for your relief by the power of medicine. In some cases it would not be so painful to me to behold the approach of death; but in your case it is beyond measure painful, because I perceive that you have cast away the only staff upon which you might have supported yourself with firmness, against all its terrors. But is it indeed true, Sir, that you have cast away this staff? Was not our last conversation sufficient, imperfect as it was, to show you that there was nothing secure but in Revelation? To take up the matter as we begun; is it not undeniable, that we are all so defective, as

to stand in need of a Savior? And if we are humble enough to feel this, can any doctrine be so worthy of acceptance, so consolatory, so cheering, as that which teaches us that there is such a Savior, and that he is the Son of God himself?"

It chilled me with horror to behold the sick man, as I said this, preparing himself to utter his cavils against the glad tidings of mercy; for his countenance betrayed the intentions of his heart. His head gray with age; his body sinking under the force of a deadly disease; his feet on the very verge of the grave;—he commended not his spirit into the hands of that mighty Being who gave it; he prayed not that it might be presented to Him, purified by the blood of the Lamb; he paused only to rally his failing breath, that he might expend even the last particle of it, as it should seem, in depreciating, in overturning the gospel, with almost malicious vehemence. But since God could bear with him, I ought not to be impatient; I suppressed my rising indignation; and combining his broken and disjointed sentences, I proceeded, as calmly as I could, and as far as seemed necessary, to refute them.

But first, I said, "I perceive, Sir, and I do it with deep unaffected sorrow, what wretched books have been your study; you have been learning, only, in the ignorant and impious school of Paine

and Carlile; you have drank down their poison, without trying or searching for the antidote.—God forgive both *them* and *you*! One indeed is gone to his everlasting account; his destiny is fixed; and I pray not for him.—The other, in prison, atones for the offended laws of his country and his God; I pray for *him*, and I pray for *you*; that it may please infinite Goodness to prolong your existence, and to mitigate your sufferings, that you may have both time and power to make your peace with God, through Christ, before you die.”

I was naturally raised above the tone of conversation; and I was willing to think that he was somewhat awe-struck by the solemnity and the devotion of my appeal to Heaven for him. However, I continued: “Let us look at some of your objections, candidly. One of them is, that, the gospel cannot be from God, because it is so recent, and not universal. If it be of such vast importance to mankind, why was not it revealed sooner, and why not to all?—All have alike souls to be saved, and, therefore, all are alike concerned.—Is this the force of your objection?”

He assented.

“Now tell me, then,” I said, “whether God be the creator of the world?”

“I allow it,” was his answer.

“Did he create it in some definite period of time, or from all eternity?” I asked.

He confessed, from what he had seen of men, and of the world itself, in his various and extensive travels, that it could not be eternal.

“Suppose then,” I said, “a person should object that the world was not created by God, because it was of comparatively so late origin; you see there would be no truth in the objection. And although God intended, in creating a new world, to communicate happiness to his creatures, might he not have had wise reasons for creating it no earlier, whether we can discover those reasons or not? Must he not indeed, as he is infinitely wise, have had the wisest reasons for doing what he did, at the time he did it?”

The sick man could not deny it.

“Apply then,” I said, “the same reasoning to the case of the Christian revelation; and why should we draw a different conclusion? In fact, it is not analogous to the rest of the dealings of Providence, to communicate any particular gift, although, it may have an evident tendency to increase the happiness of mankind, so early as we might think most suitable to the divine goodness; but in the case of Christianity, men were actually not prepared for the reception of it in any earlier period. It could not have been understood at the

time ; it could not have been proved to after ages. God, however, has graciously made the benefits of it applicable to all ages, as well antecedent as subsequent to the delivery of it. In the plans of infinite wisdom and goodness, the Lamb was slain from the foundations of the world ; and the atonement for sin, which was made by his blood, has extended to every man, who acted according to his natural light, and trusted in God. Meanwhile, preparation was made for the actual introduction of the gospel ; by setting apart the Jews for the worship of the one true God ; by committing to their care and study, numerous promises and prophecies relating to that gospel ; and by disposing and ordering the affairs of other nations in such a manner as to make them facilitate and concur in the establishment of it. In short, Sir, it would require a volume fully to explain this matter, and to give the glory which is due to its great Author ; but this simple outline is quite enough to open any man's eyes to view the subject in its proper light, and to induce him to confess, that a mere general objection against the gospel, on the ground of the lateness of the promulgation of it, is both weak and untenable."

He, indeed, was not so candid as to make this confession ; but by his silence he admitted that he had nothing to say to the contrary ; and I



therefore went on. "The gospel, you object, has not been preached to all mankind—But could it have been preached to all mankind at once?" He allowed, that it required time and opportunity to do it, if it were to be done by men. "God," I said, "certainly seems to have left it to be done by the instrumentality of men. If men, therefore, are negligent, or lukewarm about it, he will charge it to their account. However, it is manifest, that Christianity has a tendency to increase, which is not the case with any other religion. In your various travels, have you ever visited any country, however remote or uncivilized, in which there were not Missionaries established to introduce the gospel?" He confessed that he had not, so far as his inquiries extended. "The gospel, therefore," I thus went on, "is not stationary, and men are trying to spread it; whether rapidly or slowly, it matters not for the argument. I believe from the prophecies, that hereafter it will be offered and made known to the whole world; and if some thousands of years were to elapse before that event took place, such a period, however large in our estimation, might be nothing in comparison with the duration of time. A thousand years in the sight of God are but as one day. In the meanwhile, all the nations to which the gospel is not preached, are in no worse situation, than

all the world before the first preaching of it. Has your objection then any weight in it whatever?"

By this time, I had discovered, that I was never to expect from the sick man an ingenuous confession that he was in the wrong. His manner was, when he had nothing more at hand upon any point under discussion, immediately to pass on to another; and I had nothing to do but to follow him. Yet I hoped that a considerable effect must ultimately and almost imperceptibly be produced upon his mind, when he observed, which he could not fail to do, that all his arguments were capable of a ready answer; that, consequently, there was not *that* weight in them, which he originally supposed; and that in point of fact they were all, when examined, found to be untenable, and he himself had nothing to say in their defence.

He hastily reiterated his belief, that the New Testament was written three hundred years after the time when the events related are pretended to have taken place; and consequently that there was no sufficient ground for trust in such a book.

I asked him why he conceived the New Testament to have been written so recently.

"Oh! Sir," he replied at once, and positively, "it is a well-known fact.—It has been affirmed again and again, and I have not heard it once contradicted."

"That may easily be," I said, "if you read only the books on one side of the question. And now I see, by your case, that the Infidel writers are not so unskillful, as I took them to be. I could not imagine why they should venture, so often as they do, to assert the most decided and barefaced falsehoods; but I now see, that they are right in presuming, that many of their readers will give them implicit credit, and not trouble themselves to inquire whether their assertions are true or false. I am sorry to perceive, Sir, that you have acted in this manner. But tell me, have you not as good reason to believe *me*, as to believe Paine or Carlile, or any other men of their character. They have an interest, or think they have, in deceiving mankind. Have I any interest in deceiving *you*, whom I look upon as a dying man?"

"I do not see that you have," he answered.

"Well, then, I assert the contrary," I said; "I assert that the gospel was written very soon after the events recorded in it. Will you believe *me* or them?"

"As you tell me," he replied, "that I have been wrong hitherto in believing, without examination, persons whom, however, I thought credible, I should like to hear what reasons you have for your assertion."

"By all means," I rejoined, "you shall have my reasons ; but still you must give me credit for the truth of much of what I shall advance ; unless God should spare your life, and enable you to search for yourself, and thus to verify my facts. Indeed, to do it thoroughly, you should be acquainted with the Greek language, in which the New Testament was originally written ; and you should devote no little labor to the perusal and study of large and voluminous works in that and other languages. But if you are content to put so much trust in *me*, as one man does in another, in the common transactions of the world, where there can be no probable cause for deceit, I could mention enough to set your mind at ease upon this question in a few minutes."

"Well, well, Sir," he said ; "be as short as you please ; and I will give you credit for honesty."

"What more then could you expect," I inquired, "to prove that any book was written at any particular time, than that other authors, writing upon subjects connected with it, at subsequent periods, beginning from that very time, had mentioned the book, or extracted passages from it?"

"To be sure," he confessed, "if that were the case with respect to the New Testament, it would go a great way towards ascertaining the age of it."

"*That* is precisely the case," I said. "There

exists a series of writers, from the age immediately following that of the appearance of Jesus Christ, and the preaching of his Apostles, down to the time when you assert that the New Testament first appeared; which writers clearly refer to the New Testament, as a book then in being, or to some one or other of the gospels or epistles, which constitute that book; and they quote more or less from it, as it suited their purpose; so that no doubt can reasonably remain about its identity. A learned man has taken the pains to go through all those writers; to point out the particular age of each; and actually to produce the very quotations themselves which they made from the Scriptures. I could tell you *his* name, and *their* names, if it were of any use to do it. If these things be so then, can any person require more evidence?"

Without yielding, my antagonist immediately put the question rather triumphantly, "But have any Heathen writers spoken of this book? I should wish to know *that*. The testimony of enemies would be more convincing than the testimony of friends."

"Yes," I replied eagerly. "But would enemies continue to be enemies, if they were well acquainted with the origin and history of the gospel? Would they not immediately become friends,

and then give their testimony as friends? This was in fact the case with many. They were educated in Paganism, and prejudiced against Christianity; but having been induced by its extraordinary effects to inquire into its evidences, and to study the sacred writings, they were convinced; they were converted; they wrote in its defence; they sacrificed their lives in its cause. There were, however, some writers, not Christians, who do not indeed mention the New Testament, which was either impossible, on account of their age, or not to be expected on account of their opinions, but who record important circumstances relating to Christianity which are striking evidences of its truth. And it might be also, sometimes, that the silence of a particular author would be a better proof than almost any thing he could have said; but it would take up too much time to set this matter in a full, clear light. The writers, however, to whom I allude, are eminent; Suetonius, Tacitus, Juvenal, Pliny, and Josephus. In short, it is not to be doubted but that the New Testament was written as soon as might be expected after the events which it records, some parts earlier, some parts later, as the several writers thought it expedient; and it is manifest, by a thousand circumstances, that these writers, who were perfectly acquainted with the main facts of the



case, could neither have been deceived themselves, nor have had any wish to deceive others. But if their accounts be true, Christianity is true. The question is settled at once."

I paused; he answered after a little thought, "Yes, yes, I grant it, if the accounts be true, whenever written; but who can bring himself to believe such accounts? Miracles, for instance; and such miracles! Can any mortal, not entirely bereft of reason, believe the miracle of the devils and the swine?"

"We will see," I said. "But you object to all miracles?"

"I do," was his reply.

"Why?" I inquired. "Does God, the Almighty, want power to perform a miracle?"

"No; I will not assert *that*," he answered. "But, as I observe all things proceeding, now-a-days, in their regular course, according to natural causes, I feel convinced that it has been always so; and that God never altered that course, and will never alter it, for the sake of performing a miracle."

"But suppose," I said, "that God should wish to send a message to mankind; how would the Messenger be known to come from *him*, and with *his* authority? When Kings or States send Ambassadors to each other, the Ambassadors verify

their commission by undeniable instruments or documents, sealed with the arms of those Kings or States ; and these they call their credentials. Now what credentials must God give to *his* Ambassadors to obtain reception for them, and to awaken due attention to his message? What so simple, what so convincing, as a portion of his own power, exceeding the power of man? The credentials indeed must be something miraculous. Nothing conformable to the established laws of nature could possibly attest the extraordinary presence of God. If the messenger came surrounded with the utmost worldly pomp and grandeur; if he spake as never man spake, with the most persuasive and commanding eloquence; if he lived such a life as to exemplify all the noblest and most difficult moral virtues; it would not prove incontestably that God was with him. No! Divine power is the only direct and irrefragable evidence of a divine message; so that in this case you see miracles are agreeable to reason, and by no means contrary to it."

He was silent; and I was fearful, lest, to evade my argument, he should have denied the possibility or probability of any revelation whatever; which would have led to an interminable discussion; but he pursued a different course, and after a while, collecting himself to speak, he said, "Dr.

Warton, I have been in many parts of the world ; and, it is true, wherever I was, I saw that some religion or other had got hold of the affections of the people. But, in general, these religions were so absurd and foolish, that their falsehood appeared at once. Yet there were none of them which did not pretend to have their miracles. But these miracles were certainly all impostures ; and therefore I fell into the conclusion that no miracles were true ; which is the safest conclusion to abide by, after all."

" Your conclusion was a very hasty one," I replied, " and it seems to me that it was contrary to all just reasoning, and far from being safe. You should rather have argued, that, as religion was natural to mankind—(for you saw it every where;) and as mankind were equally disposed to believe in miracles—(for you met with no religion which did not boast of its miracles;) so the probability would be, that some religion might be true, and some miracles attesting that religion true also. From whence you should have gone on to try the Christian religion and its miracles more especially, as being received in your own country, and involving questions of inconceivable moment, by the proper test for the ascertainment of their truth or falsehood. Miracles, it is plain, are agreeable to the common sense of mankind ; and you have al-

lowed already that they are not impossible ; it follows therefore that you ought to examine what testimony there is in their favor, when so great an interest is at stake, and when they are brought forward to prove the truth of a religion which sets life or death before you."

He had nothing to say to all this ; and I did not think it wise to press him with questions, to his own confusion ; so I went on thus. "The miracles indeed of Pagan nations, and the modern miracles of the Papists, are for the most part confuted by their own inherent absurdities, or by the want of a sufficient cause for the interference of the Almighty ; but the Christian miracles, wrought for the purpose of introducing Christianity, and proving it to be from God, had the worthiest cause, and were generally in their own nature noble instances of goodness and mercy as well as of power. What think you of healing the sick, of feeding the hungry, of making the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, the blind to see, the dead to rise ? And all this by a word, or a touch ? Have you not here two stamps of divinity impressed upon those miracles, power and goodness ?"

He could not deny it, but he interposed, that this was not the character of them all. "Perhaps not," I said ; "but it is the character of so large a

portion of them, as naturally to dispose us in favor of the rest. And what are the rest? the blasting of the fig-tree, the finding of the tribute-money in the fish's mouth, the walking upon the sea, the subduing of the storm, when the sovereign Author of nature, with that voice which all nature hears and obeys, said to the winds and waves, 'Peace! be still! and immediately there was a great calm?' Is there any thing absurd in these miracles to discredit them at once? Were they a mere ostentation of power? Or were they not performed most aptly and seasonably, and all but one so as to strike the disciples with additional awe of their Master, and thereby to increase their faith in him?"

"Yes! Sir," he replied; "it may be so with respect to those which you have selected; but you say nothing of the miracle of the devils and the swine, to which I objected from the first; and which you cannot explain, and therefore appear to me to evade.—Look to that, Sir!" he continued somewhat triumphantly. "*That* is the point upon which I wait for information."

"Well, I will give you what information I can upon that too," I answered. "Only I would have you take notice, that if I were unable to explain that miracle so fully and clearly as I have

explained the others, it would not injure my argument. Is it reasonable, that a single difficulty, or many difficulties, should destroy at once the effect of every thing else, which is so perfectly plain and simple?"

He would not say that it was; but he was sure, that where there were difficulties, there would always be doubts; and as to possession by devils, he thought the whole story incredible.

"Do you believe," I asked, "that there are such beings as evil spirits?"

"I am rather inclined to think that there are not," was his answer.

"Are you aware," I asked again, "that all nations, in all times, as far as we can know, have believed in the existence of supernatural beings both good and bad?"

"I am aware of it," he replied, "and, indeed, I myself observed in my travels, that the religion of some nations was chiefly the result of their fear of bad spirits."

"The belief then of the existence of beings of superior power to men, and inclined to be mischievous to men, being universal, is natural to the human mind; is it not?" I inquired.

He granted that it was.

"Well, then," I continued, "*that* is a presumption, at least, that there really are such beings;



and I, who believe the fact to be so, believe also, that one way, in which the idea became so prevalent, as to appear natural, is by tradition from the first ages of the world; and I am sure, that the account given of those beings in the Scriptures, is a most consistent account, and the only rational one to be found any where; namely, that they were made originally by the great Creator of the same rank with the angels themselves, and gifted with the same excellent endowments, and put into possession of the same bliss and glory; that, being free to stand or fall, they fell by voluntary transgression, from this, their first estate; that, since their fall, they have been permitted by Providence to tempt mankind to sin, for the trial and illustration of human faith and virtue.

“But to come to the miracle. I believe, that, in the first age of the gospel, these devils were permitted to torment the bodies, as well as to tempt the passions and appetites of men; one purpose of which was, to show, what perhaps could not have been shown otherwise, that Jesus Christ, who cast them out, had a power superior to their's; and thus to raise the faith of the true Christian, to a full and perfect confidence, that the kingdom of darkness would finally be overthrown by the same power, and the kingdom of righteousness established on its ruins for ever. However, there

might have been then, as there are now, persons who thought that the sick people, afflicted by the devil, as we say, upon Scripture authority, were not really so; but that they labored under imaginary disorders of the mind, which they themselves, in the paroxysms of their madness, interpreted in that manner. Now, I ask you, is it possible, do you think, for irrational animals to be troubled with diseases of the imagination?"

He allowed, that it was not possible.

"It would perhaps, then," I continued, "be no bad method of showing that these afflictions, which we call possessions by devils, were not disorders of the imagination, if it were seen that irrational animals were also affected by them."

He was aware of the drift of my reasoning, and therefore, as he could not controvert it, after his former concession, he remained silent, and left me to draw the conclusion, that, besides other reasons for sending the devils into the swine, this might have been one, that it proved the exercise of a real power by those beings which was subject to the power of Christ. This visible conquest over Satan, was, in fact, the beginning to bruise the serpent's head, and an earnest of his future complete destruction, according to the earliest prophecy delivered in Paradise, for the consolation

of our first parents, and the confirming of the faith of their whole posterity.

Here I thought it advisable to close the conversation for the present. It was wonderful indeed, that the sick man could have supported his part in it so long. In body, however, he was certainly not worse than when we began; in mind there was a sensible alteration for the better; and I tacitly besought God, that he would give me the time, and also enable me to enlighten and convince him still further, that he might die in the true and steadfast faith of Christ, I refrained from asking him how far I had already succeeded. He was not yet ripe for confessions. He would, perhaps, have denied that any change had taken place in his opinions; but upon the whole it was sufficiently apparent, and I contented myself with remarking it in his silence. I now took my leave, with a promise that I would be with him on the following day, which he seemed to receive with pleasure, and which he acknowledged with thanks.

I visited him, according to my engagement, and was surprised to find a man, whom the day before I supposed to be dying, now seated in his chair, as at the first, and breathing with much more freedom. In fact, his disease had taken a favorable turn, and in consequence, he had ob-

tained some comfortable rest in the night, and was now enjoying this temporary ease. But there was no reason to think that it could be more than temporary; and therefore, in congratulating him upon the pause of his disorder, I still kept in view the certainty that it must terminate fatally.

“God,” I said, “has been gracious to you, and has spared you another day for the momentous work in which you are employed. Whilst the day lasts, let us be diligent in the use of it; for the night cometh when no man can work. Yesterday, when I entered your chamber, your life seemed to hang upon a single thread, and I expected to see it snap asunder. The same danger may return, you know not how soon; God grant that you may be well prepared to meet it! Shall I kneel down, therefore, and thank God for his present mercy, and beg his future help, in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, whom he has appointed to be the only Mediator between men and himself?”

This proposition I made to try him, and that I might not contend in the dark with respect to his actual sentiments. For he showed no disposition to give me any positive information about himself expressly by words; I could only judge by deeds and casual circumstances; nor had I seen his wife this morning, so as to get any information

from her on this interesting point. I was not a little grieved, therefore, when, instead of accepting my offer to pray for him, he replied carelessly, "that he could never digest the doctrine of a Mediator between God and men; and *that* Mediator the Son of God himself; and *him* too crucified, dead, and buried. There is something," he asserted, "so strange, so incredible, so contradictory to reason, in the whole scheme and idea of it, that even undoubted miracles could never prove it."

Alas! alas! thought I; how must we waste, perhaps irrecoverably, and in fruitless disputation, the precious hours that should have been spent in earnest prayer for grace and pardon. However, I could only follow where *he* led me; and at least it was satisfactory to observe, that he spoke no longer with the same sarcastic tone of voice, as on the day before. The very objection which he brought forward now, was then put in a form which I should be shocked to record; *now* it was expressed with moderation. I did not, therefore, permit myself to despair; but, on the contrary, pleased and encouraged myself with the hope that another day might, by God's blessing, produce a still more remarkable change.

I said, therefore, "Suppose you had a favor to ask of the king's chief minister, upon whom

however, you had no claim whatever ; and suppose also, that you had happened to be acquainted with a person of inferior rank, but high in influence with that minister ; would you apply directly to the great man, yourself, or through the person who was the common friend of both ?”

“ I should apply,” he answered, “ through the common friend.”

“ He would be your mediator then,” said I, “ would he not ?”

“ He certainly would,” was his reply.

“ And is not this,” I continued, “ the common practice of mankind, where they who have favors to grant, are far above them, and out of their reach, as it were, to endeavor to prevail upon some other person or persons to mediate for them ; that is, to go between the parties which are at a distance, and to approximate them to each other, and thus to accomplish the wished-for object ?”

He allowed that it was.

“ And more especially,” I added, “ if you had offended the superior man by your conduct, and had reason to think that he would punish you, instead of favoring you ; would you venture to approach him under such circumstances, and boldly ask him to do you some great kindness ?”

“ I would not,” he said.



"But if a friend of your's," thus I went on, "should voluntarily undertake to go to the great man for you, and should bid you to have good hope of success, in spite of the unpromising nature of your case, because that he himself would be your advocate and mediator, and that the great man never refused him any thing; should you not be overpowered with joy? Should you not accept so unexpected and advantageous an offer, with the utmost gratitude?"

"Undoubtedly, I ought to do so."

"Well, then," I summed up my argument, "this is pretty much the case between God and men. The parties are at an immense distance. One lies under the displeasure of the other, and yet looks up to that other for inestimable benefits. Glad, therefore, ought we to be, supremely glad, that there is another person at hand, willing to undertake, and able to effect a reconciliation between them. This, then, is the Christian scheme; according, you see, with the common reason of mankind."

My adversary was silent, as heretofore, when the argument appeared to be against his positions; but his hostility was manifestly relaxed, and he no longer seemed to think that he had lost any thing, when his assertions were overturned. I therefore proceeded.

"Now, if this intermediate person were of such a description, as to be a natural connecting link between the parties, would he not be admirably adapted to the office? If, for instance, he were perfectly acquainted with all the circumstances of both, by his own experience too, would not *that* be a vast advantage?"

He granted that it would.

"Well, then," I said, "could any one know the two parties better than *he*, who has the nature of both?"

"Probably not,"

"Here again, then," I rejoined, "You have the Christian scheme of a Mediator, who is both God and man, consistent, as you perceive, with the deductions of your best reason.

"The whole dispensation, expressed summarily, is this:—God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity: he cannot tolerate in his presence the slightest stain of sin; he dwells in the dazzling splendor of inaccessible light, and even the blessed angels themselves, with their wings, veil their faces before him. Man, debased by the fall, and by his own transgressions, cannot approach him to ask for pardon and grace; the desire of all nations, in all ages, has been to find a Mediator. At length, in the fulness of the times, the Mediator comes, who is the brightness of the

Divine glory, and the express image of the Divine person. But through the cloud of mortal frailty he shines with a milder radiance than his Heavenly Father. Incarnate by the Holy Ghost, and under his constant influence, he is utterly devoid of all sin; yet his virtues, being human virtues, however high and exalted, they create in us no alarm or apprehension. We come boldly to him for help in time of need. \* He pleads for us the merits of *that* death, which, being a man, he was enabled to undergo: a death, which was an all-sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world, because it was the death of one, who, being in the form of God, emptied himself of his native glories, and exhibited himself in the fashion of a man, and stooped to the ignominy of the Cross, Well, then, we may think him mighty to save, and accept with confidence, his gracious offers of reconciling us to our offended God! Will you be angry with him for his astonishing love towards you? Will you refuse to acknowledge his divine nature, because he took the human? Will you not pray in his name, because he submitted to shame, and death for you?"

My zeal would have carried me on still further; but observing some favorable symptoms of remorse in my patient's countenance and manner, and also an inclination to speak, I stopped, and

he immediately said,—“You have drawn, Sir, it must be granted, a very pleasing picture of the chief features of the Christian religion. I see many things in a different light from that in which I have been too long accustomed to view them. I am obliged to you for every kindness which you have shown to me during my sickness; but more especially, for the pains which you have taken to correct my erroneous notions of Christianity.”

I soon after left him, saying, as I rose to go away, “may God send his Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind, and to purify your heart !”

As I pursued my walk, in the discharge of other clerical duties, I reflected, with satisfaction, upon the scene which had just passed. We had not, indeed, yet arrived at any decided evidence of a real change, but a foundation appeared to be laid, which a few days ago seemed utterly hopeless.

THE morrow came, and I hastened to visit him again ; but unavoidable accidents kept me on the road a few minutes beyond the hour. On entering the house, I saw at once the marks of some great calamity. His wife hurried down stairs to me ; consternation sat upon her countenance. I inquired eagerly what was the matter ; and was answered, that her husband was dying.

“ Oh ! Sir,” she said, “ he has been very impatient for your arrival. He has asked again and again if it were twelve o’clock. Again and again he has expressed a great alarm lest you should not be here before he died.”

I rushed up stairs, much disturbed, and struck with awe at the doings of the Almighty. Here was a striking instance of the wretched weakness of man, and of *His* irresistible power. The sick man yesterday, so much better and stronger, with the prospect of some weeks at least, before him ; and so far renewed in the spirit of his mind, as to have appointed this day and this hour for the commencement of religious exercises, was stretched upon the bed of death, and now almost a lifeless corpse. His eyes were closed ; his face was black and ghastly ; his throat rattled as the breath forced a passage through it. I seized his hand, and pressed it. He opened his eyes convulsively, and shut them instantly. He attempted to speak, but no intelligible sounds escaped from his lips. Nevertheless, his mind was manifestly not yet gone ; and I hoped that he still possessed the sense of hearing. I knelt down, therefore, and began in a loud and solemn tone that most beautiful, affecting, and divine prayer, which is prescribed for the sick at the point of their departure. His lips moved, as if he were trying to accompa-

ny me. This sign of God's gracious goodness towards him, in the midst of his dreadful agony, for a moment overpowered me, and of necessity, I stopped. He began to speak, and I put my head close to catch his words.

He said, "it is very comfortable to me;" and that was all which I could distinctly understand. It was evident that he did not finish the sentence which he intended; for he began over and over again in the same words. When he had entirely ceased, I resumed the prayer; his lips moved again for a short time, and then became motionless altogether. I grasped his hand, and asked him, if he died in the faith of Jesus Christ. He gave me no sign. Unwilling to distress his last moments, I withdrew; ejaculating to Heaven a petition for the salvation of his soul, and at length relieved by tears.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE END OF INFIDELITY.

As I was sitting at home one rainy day, and earnestly engaged in the preparation of a sermon for the following Sunday, expecting that the weather would have secured me from all chance of being disturbed by visitors, the name of Mr. Sambrook was announced. He was a considerable farmer, with whom I had long wished to have an opportunity of conversing, and which I had totally despaired of obtaining, unless it might please Providence to inflict some lingering calamity upon him. I was well aware that the object of his present visit was entirely secular; but I hoped to extract something spiritual out of it, and therefore, put by my papers with great satisfaction, and desired that he might be brought into my study.

A short, fat, rosy man, beyond the middle age, was introduced. His dress and manner were rough, for a person having so much intercourse with the neighboring town; but there was a liveliness and cheerfulness in his whole air and gestures, which induced me at once, to think that I might say what I chose to him, consistently with

my situation, without the danger of giving him offence. And certainly it seemed necessary that much should be said ; at church I never had seen him ; he was accused of acts of uncommon profligacy, and he was bringing up his family in an absolute neglect of all religion.

He had long been endeavoring to evade the payment of his parish dues, and now called upon me, to see if some compromise could not be made, by which he could still avoid the claims of the law. After conversing with him for some time upon this subject, I relinquished a large part of the debt he owed me, and the rest he was to pay by instalments. This business being settled, I said, " I hope, Mr. Sambrook, that you and I shall be good friends in future ; that you will fulfill your present bargain punctually and honorably ; and that by coming to church, you will give me opportunities of promoting your highest good,—the salvation of your soul."

Here I concluded, and he said nothing more in reply, than that he was desirous of being on friendly terms with me, and that he would do his utmost to discharge his debt ; as to the rest, he shook his head, and gave me no encouragement. Thus we separated for this time. The payments that were to be made would, I supposed, bring us together again often ; and I trusted that some-

thing more for his benefit might hereafter be done.

The appointed day for the first payment having arrived, and passed without notice, I could not help suspecting that Mr. Sambrook had still some intentions of deceiving me, and of escaping from his own contract.\* To pay away money on any account, even where it was due, was contrary to his nature and habits. His taxes and rates were seldom obtained except after the first process of the law, a summons by a magistrate, or a lawyer's letter; so that it would have been ridiculous for me to expect better treatment. An opening, however, having now been made for an attempt to bring him gradually to Christian principles, I determined to proceed by the gentlest methods, and, if possible, to give no cause for fresh irritation. I walked therefore in the direction of his house, and found him in one of his fields, near home, looking at a most beautiful apple-tree, which was in full bloom, and covered with blossoms of various shades of color.

After the usual salutations, fortunately, he began himself with apologising for his want of punctuality to his engagements, and having stated

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\* The reader will perceive from this dialogue, that it is customary in England for the clergyman himself to collect his dues from his parishioners.

some reason or other for it, not very satisfactory, I accepted it nevertheless at once; and he then paid me the sum that was first due; being, as he affirmed, about to bring it to me. At the same time he expressed a hope, which was wonderful for such a person, that others paid me better than he did.

"They do, certainly," I replied; "but now that we are better acquainted, you will perhaps not yield to any of them. But what must we do for a receipt?"

"Oh! never mind;" he said, "your word is as good as a stamp."

"I hope it is." I answered; "but my memory may fail me."

"I will trust to that too," he replied.

This amused me exceedingly; but I found universally, that all who persisted in calling me rogue and robber behind my back, never hesitated for a moment to put the most entire confidence in me, when we had any money transactions together.

"Very well," I said; "I only wish that you would trust me in things of much greater importance. Mr. Sambrook, you are getting into years; infirmities will come, and sickness, and death. But it would be wise to reflect seriously upon your condition, before you are forced to do so, and when to do it will be more painful, and less

easy. Indeed, when I look at your frame and figure, I cannot help fearing, that you may be carried out of this world by one of those sudden, instantaneous, unexpected attacks, which are now so common amongst us; and that it may not please Providence to give you any warnings by a gradual diminution of your health and vigor. You appear to me, Sir, as far as I have the power of judging, and I speak it with unfeigned sorrow, you appear to be living without the worship and even the knowledge of a God; and is not this, besides the danger of it, to degrade yourself to a level with the animals below you, brute and irrational, who feed, and sleep, and perform all their other offices, without being conscious of a Creator and Preserver?"

I watched him closely whilst I was speaking, but I could not ascertain the current of his thoughts. On the whole, I conjectured that shame alone prevented him from avowing himself at once an Atheist. When I paused, he said, "That he considered a sudden death as much preferable to a lingering one, and hoped that his own might be sudden."

"What!" I asked, "whether prepared or unprepared?"

"I am so far prepared," was his answer, "as to be certain that I must die; and I do not find

things go on so smoothly and pleasantly here, as to make me very desirous of a long life?"

"But what do you think of the next life?" I asked again: "Things may go on less smoothly and pleasantly there, unless we have made a due preparation here by virtue and piety. You have a soul, which will never die; and which is now in a state of trial; God, who is a God of justice, will judge it hereafter, when the trial is finished; and if he find it defiled with drunkenness and sensuality, or any other vice, he will assign to it a terrible lot in eternity. Do you believe all this?"

"No, Sir," he replied: "these things are too deep for me. I was brought up from my youth to a life of labor. I am no scholar; but I have talked with people who are; and they say that they believe none of these things. And it seems reasonable that no man should be forced to believe what he cannot understand. How do I know that there is any God? I cannot understand what sort of Being he can be, nor where he can live, nor how he can know what I am doing or thinking now. I say the same about souls, and another world after this, and a last judgment, and everlasting punishment: I cannot understand it; and I stick to this, that I cannot believe, and therefore cannot act upon any thing which I do not under-



stand." In saying all this, he spoke with a tone of vehemence and positiveness, which plainly implied that he thought his position impregnable.

"What tree is this," I inquired, "which looks so uncommonly beautiful?"

"Why, an apple-tree, to be sure," he answered.

"And does it generally bear fruit?" I inquired again.

"Yes," said he, "abundance; and of the very best sorts too; for you see the different flowers, and may guess therefore that it bears different sorts."

"And what do you do with the apples, when they are ripe? You give them to the pigs, I suppose, or throw them upon the dunghill."

"Are you mad, Sir!" he interrupted me eagerly. "They are fit for the king's table! They fetch the very highest price in the market; and I prize them exceedingly."

"How delighted I am," said I, "to have met you near this remarkable tree! For I have always been extremely desirous of understanding something about the production of flowers and fruits; and as you are the wise man who never believe or act upon any thing which you do not perfectly comprehend, I hope you will not be so unkind as to refuse to impart your knowledge to me."

He was not exactly aware of the drift of my reasoning; but he suspected by my manner that

I wished to banter him a little; so he answered cautiously, that he would gladly tell me whatever he knew.

“Oh, do not deceive me,” I said, “or cut short my expectations! Of course you know every thing about it; or you would not have done as you have, first planting this tree itself; then grafting upon it the various sorts; pruning every year the superfluous branches; plucking off the superabundant fruit, for the improvement of the rest; and, in short, pursuing all the rules of good husbandry, which are generally crowned with success.”

He doubted where this would end, and was silent; so I proceeded.

“There can be no doubt, I suppose that earth, and water, and air, and heat, and light, work all the wonders that we ever see in this apple-tree. Do you know of any other element that is in any way concerned in the growth of vegetables?”

He thought there could not be any other.

“Well, then,” I said, “and how do these elements make the tree grow?”

“The sap rises in the spring,” he answered, “and spreads through the whole.”

“But what is the sap?” I asked. “Is it any thing else but the mixture of those several elements?”

He allowed that it could not be any thing else.

"Certainly," I said, "it cannot. Now therefore tell me how this sap makes wood, and bark, and leaves, and flowers, and fruit. Had this tree any leaves, or flowers, a month ago?"

"It had not," he said.

"What a nimble, and astonishing, and skilful workman, then," I said, "must this sap be, to do so much, and to produce such beautiful things in so short a space! and so unlike the sap itself too! What pencil painted these flowers with such lively, varying, delicate tints, and yet had only the gross materials of earth and water to do it with; assisted, indeed, by the lighter ones of air, and heat, and light? And observe; the sap rises, no doubt, without variation in itself, to that point in the stem from whence the different branches set out: what is it which changes the proportions of its component parts afterwards? For almost every branch, you see, bears a different flower from any other, and therefore the sap must run through it in a different proportion, or with a different power. Explain this to me."

"Oh! Sir," he answered, "it is Nature that does it all—Nature is wonderful indeed!"

"But who, or what is Nature?" I asked.  
"Is Nature any living being, or what else?"

"Not a living being, certainly," he said; "but what else I cannot tell."

"If Nature, then," I asked again, "be without life and understanding, what can she do by herself? In point of fact, when we talk of Nature, do we not always mean the rule, or law, or manner, in and by which all things produce their ends and objects? As in the case of the sap; the sap rises by a certain rule, and varies the proportions of its component parts by a certain rule, and disposes itself over the branches of the tree by a certain rule; and then we say this is the effect of Nature."

"That is it, I dare say," was his answer; and he seemed glad to escape from the difficulty.

But I immediately rejoined, "If this be so, then we must have somebody who made the rule; somebody who laid down the law; somebody who ordained the manner, according to which all matter acts. Rules and laws do not make themselves; do they?"

Here he began to be alarmed, lest he should be forced to acknowledge the necessity of a God; so he said, "May not all these things take place by chance?"

"That seems impossible," I replied. "It is at least incredible. Did you ever see these branches bearing different fruits at different times?"

"No," he said.

"But always the same?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered; "always the same."

"Then chance," I continued, "is entirely out of the question. Things which never vary must proceed by some steady, constant rule, must they not?"

He could not deny it.

"Who is it, then," I asked, "that made this rule, which could not make itself?"

He was pressed very hard, but could not bring himself to confess that there must be a God. At last, after having tried various ways, as it seemed, in his own mind, to avoid this necessity, he exclaimed, with a sort of joy, "I have it? It must be, that things have gone on in the same manner always without any beginning at all. This accounts for every thing at once in the shortest and simplest way."

"It appears to me, on the contrary," I said, "that this supposition of yours accounts for nothing, and increases all the difficulties. Suppose a vast chain hanging from the sky, and reaching within a few yards of the earth; and I should ask you, what supports the bottom link, and you should tell me that it was supported by the link above it, and that those two links were supported by the third link, and so on; and then I should

ask what supports the whole chain? Should you think it a sufficient answer to say that the chain had no first link, and was endless? Must not an endless chain be a very long one, and consequently be a very heavy one, and require a much greater power to support it? If a chain of ten links requires a certain force to hold it, must not a chain of an infinite length require an infinite force? Because the chain is of an infinite length, you will not surely say that it requires no force whatever to support it."

I twisted this into different forms, as he was obstinately silent, and manifestly confounded, though resolute not to yield; and then I added, that it was the same with every chain of causes and effects. "Be the chain as long as it may, it requires some first and mighty cause to set the whole in motion. It is the same also with the rule; however long it may have been in action, there must have been a maker of it; and the wiser the rule the wiser the maker. Indeed, in the case of a rule, the matter is strikingly evident. If this apple tree had understanding and speech, it would tell us, no doubt, that its prime end and object was to bear fruit, would it not?"

"It would certainly," he said.

"And are there not," I asked, "many contri-



vances about the tree with a view to this particular purpose of bearing fruit?"

He allowed it.

I gathered a blossom, and continued, "Look at this blossom; do you see these fine threads, which are called the stamens?"

"I do," he answered.

"They are the male parts of the flower," I said; "and the fruit could not be produced without them. See again these still finer threads, in the very centre; they are called the females, and are absolutely essential. In the little heads of the stamens, you observe, there is a thin powdery dust; some of it falls, when ripe, upon the summits of these female threads, and it is detained there by a glutinous liquid; afterwards it passes down each thread, which is a tube, and having arrived at the bottom, the embryo fruit is formed, and begins to swell, and at last reaches the size of the apple, which you commend so much. Is not all this wonderful? Are there not plain marks about it of contrivance and design?"

He confessed that it seemed so.

"And who ever heard," I asked, "of contrivance and design, without a contriver and designer?"

He was compelled to grant that it was inconceivable.

"Is not a watch," I said, "a very beautiful and skillful contrivance for showing the hour and minute of day and night?"

"It is indeed," he answered.

"And when you see it," I continued, "do you not immediately infer a watchmaker?"

"I do," he replied.

I asked again, "You would think it absurd, would you not, to suppose that this exact order, directed to such an object, sprung from chance? And if any person should tell you, that this watch, after all, was not really made by a watchmaker, but by another watch adapted to the purpose, and furnished with a most complicated machinery, what would you think of it?"

"Why, I should think," said he, "that the maker of the other watch was ten thousand times more clever than I thought the maker of the simple watch."

"You would be perfectly in the right," I said. "And the last thing, that would ever come into your thoughts, would be, that a watch, which was so artfully framed as to make another, had no contriver and maker of itself?"

He allowed it would; and then I inquired, if he thought we could get rid of the necessity of a contriver, designer, and maker, by supposing an

endless series of watches, each making the next to it in the series.

“I might have thought so before,” he replied; “but after what has been said, I cannot think so any longer.”

“Nothing can be clearer, and more indisputable,” said I. “Wherever there is an undoubted contrivance, there is an undoubted contriver also, be he at whatever distance he may from the productions of the present moment. Now, I ask then, whether man be not one of the most astonishing contrivances of all? And if so, whether you think it reasonable that a watch should have a contriver, and man not?”

He was speechless, and trembled a little; fearing, as it should seem, that there must be a God, who at first created him, and might hereafter judge him. Seeing him thus affected, I concluded the conversation; hoping that I had planted a sting in his bosom, which would give him continual pain, until he had searched the wound to the bottom; and I added only, in a tone of moderation, and without any appearance of a triumph, “Act in religion, Mr. Sambrook, as you do in other things. How many things are there of which you know nothing; and yet you believe and act as if your knowledge was perfect? Why not the same in religion, which is of infinitely

more importance than any thing else? And now, that you have discovered a God, the wise contriver and maker of all things, I leave you to consider, whether he ought to be served and worshiped, or not. Good morning! I wish you well, with all my heart." He bowed, and we parted.

I DID not see Mr. Sambrook again so soon as I expected. He made two more payments, but not in person; the money having been sent by a child, without any demand for a receipt or memorandum. At length, before the next payment became due, he visited me himself, in no slight tribulation. My lawyer had delivered a bill of the expenses, and had fixed a day for the discharge of it; this was not attended to, and the consequence was, that a letter had arrived, thundering out all the vengeance of the law. I promised at once to arrange this matter for him; and accordingly I wrote immediately, in his presence, to desire, at my own risk, that the payment of the costs might be deferred till after the payment of the instalments.

This, then, having been settled to his satisfaction, I expressed my regret that two or three Sundays had passed since our last conversation, without my seeing him at church.

“Why, Sir,” he said, “to tell you the truth, I think what you said to me was very clever, and I could not contradict it at the time. But I have considered since, that the matter is not quite so clear as you tried to make it appear to be. You told me that God contrived and made every thing; and you spoke also of his wisdom. Now, a wise person, I should suppose, would never contrive or make any thing useless, or mischievous; and you cannot deny that we are over-run with such things, both of the animal and vegetable kinds—What say you to this, Sir?”

“You mean, perhaps,” I replied, “such animals as destroy your corn and your fruit; and vegetables, like nettles, and docks, and brambles, and briars, and other weeds, which cost you so much pains to extirpate, and which, if neglected, would exhaust upon their own growth all the riches of the soil?”

“I do,” he said. “And as you have yourself mentioned nettles, I should be glad if you would show me their use; that I might have a reason for thinking that they had a wise maker.”

Mr. Sambrook was disposed to be jocose with me, fancying that I could not attempt so ridiculous a thing as to prove nettles to be useful. However, I inquired if he would consider any substance to be useful which contributed to the

support of men. He allowed that he should ; but he was sure that nettles did not so contribute ; unless I pretended that nettle-broth was good for an ague. Here he laughed, and seemed highly diverted with the notion of nettles contributing to the support of mankind. I was pleased to see him in good humor, and calling one of my children, I desired him to bring me the largest nettle that he could find, in a few minutes, and to take especial care not to prick himself with it. Mr. Sambrook was still more amused, and joked with the little boy about carrying the nettle, and advised him to put his gloves on. Meanwhile, I asked whether men ate millstones. He began to think me crazy.

"But," I said, "millstones may be useful, may they not, although they are not eatable? So that," I went on, "to prove a thing to be useful to men, as contributing to their support, it is only necessary to show that it is, in the order of causes, like the millstone, near or remote."

He granted it.

"Now look at this nettle then," I said, which the child had just brought into the room ; and upon the leaves of which, on a slight examination, I discovered several insects of the same species, enjoying, as it appeared, a most delicious meal.

"Well," he cried, "I did not know to a cer-



tainty before that any creature loved nettles. But what has this to do with our present talk?"

"It is most closely concerned with it," I replied. "These insects are the food of other animals, and those other animals are the food of man."

"Yes, Papa," said the little boy; "I have often seen the birds flying out of the nettles, but I never knew before that they went there for their food."

Mr. Sambrook was evidently staggered: but his natural shrewdness did not forsake him; and he inquired immediately, whether it would not have been more wise to have provided something for these insects that was less mischievous to us.

"Then," said I, "you would wish, I suppose, rather than not, that snails, and caterpillars, and other noxious creatures, as they are called, fed upon your lettuces, and cabbages, and richest fruits?"

"Not that exactly neither," he replied.

"Would it not be best," I inquired, "if they fed entirely upon weeds?"

He allowed it.

"But these weeds must have ground to grow upon; must they not? And wherever they grow, they become hurtful to other more valuable plants; do they not?"

"They do," he replied.

"Is industry better than idleness?" I asked.

"Certainly," he answered.

"Does not the clearing away of weeds absolutely require industry?" I asked again. "And is not idleness always punished by the growth of weeds, and the consequent impoverishment of the valuable crop?"

"It is true, undoubtedly," was his answer.

"Then after all," I said, "these contemptible and noxious vegetables, as we consider them, may answer the purposes of a wise Being, who has a vast variety of creatures to provide for, and who may wish to make the virtue of industry necessary to man. In fact, the whole truth of the matter is to be found only in this precious book, which lies here upon my table, and out of which I will now read to you the account of it."

"Dear me! Sir," he exclaimed: "I never thought that I was come here to have the Bible read to me!"

"What can the minister do better," I said, "than to read God's book to his flock; and what can *you* do better than study it? In our last conversation you told me that it was impossible for you to ascertain any thing about the nature of God; now I tell you that you may ascertain every thing necessary to be known about him by the study of this holy book. Listen therefore, at

least whilst I read the explanation of this one fact."

I then took the Bible into my hands, and selected a few verses from the three first chapters of Genesis; particularly dwelling upon the circumstance, that when God rested from the great work of creation, he saw every thing which he had made, and behold it was very good; but that after the transgression of Adam and Eve, the ground was cursed for their sakes, and commanded to produce thorns and thistles; that they and all their descendants might eat bread in the sweat of their brows, until they returned unto the dust, from which they were taken. Having commented upon this great transaction in such a manner as to make him catch at least some glimpses of it, (for he was entirely uninformed about it before,) I proceeded thus:—

"See now, Mr. Sambrook, the wonderful goodness of God, who even in judgment always remembers mercy. He diminished indeed the original happiness of man; but what a happy world is this after all! Many people have not sense enough to see it, because it is indulged commonly to all of us; and too many who see it have not gratitude enough to acknowledge it. Food and drink, generally speaking, cannot be procured without labor; can they?"

"Certainly not," he answered.

"And people must eat and drink, to live must they not?" I asked.

"They must," he said.

"So that if it had been a painful thing to eat and drink, yet men would have gladly submitted to it; would they not?" I asked again.

He agreed with me that they undoubtedly would.

"What do you think of it then yourself?" I inquired. "Do you reckon it a painful thing to eat and drink, which you would not undergo, but for the sake of preserving life?"

He candidly confessed that eating and drinking, on the very contrary, were amongst the most pleasant and delightful of all acts, and that probably millions of men were scarcely conscious of any other pleasure.

"But God," I said, "who made eating and drinking necessary, might have superadded to it either pain or pleasure, just as it suited his own temper; his having made it pleasant and delightful, therefore, was a signal mark of pure, abundant, and disinterested goodness."

Mr. Sambrook seemed to be let into a new world. He made no scruple whatever to tell me, that he never recollected once to have thought of such things; and I might perhaps have pursued

the conversation in the same strain to his advantage; but I was aware that he could not conveniently be spared from his business, and therefore I dismissed him with these words:

“This, Sir, is but one proof, out of an infinite number of proofs, of God’s goodness. The whole day would be gone before we could speak of a millionth part of them. His mercies are over all his works. Think of this, and you will begin to love him, and to desire to please him, and serve him, and to be more satisfied with yourself. And, however you may be conscious to yourself, that you fall below the perfection of his law, yet do not fear. He, in the exercise of the same goodness, has provided a remedy for this, with which you may become acquainted, by reading the New Testament, and by frequenting your church. In both those acts too, you may expect God’s especial blessing to light upon you.”

He departed, without letting me into the present state of his feelings. If the coming to church was to be the test of any serious change, I feared that he would find it a most difficult thing to do so. Shame alone was too likely to deter him. However, I trusted to time, the continuance of our conversations, and the good providence of God.

IN the interval, between this and our next meeting, an awful event occurred in Mr. Sambrook's family, which was calculated to promote my views, by leading naturally to serious and solemn reflection. A sister, who had come from a distance to visit him, died suddenly in his house. He attended the funeral, which took place in my own church-yard; and I myself performed the ceremony. In this, and in the other occasional services, I always take the utmost pains to give them their due effect. Many persons are present at marriages, and christenings, and funerals, who never have come to church on any other occasion; and they are the only opportunities which the minister has of making any impression upon them whatever; opportunities which he would be unwise to neglect. If he can but touch their hearts by the solemn devoutness of his tone, and manner, in these services, they may be tempted to come and see what he is in his greater function of preaching. I know indeed, that this has frequently happened; and I know also, on the other hand, that much scandal has arisen where this salutary, and but decent practice, has not been attended to. People have gone away with the full idea that the minister cared nothing about these duties; which was either a great shock to their feelings, if they were religious persons, or con-



firmed them in their irreligion, if they were the contrary. In both cases great mischief has been done.

On the present occasion, I acted only as I always do; and I found that it was noticed, to the credit of our religion. The funeral was on a Sunday, and the crowd was the more numerous. In a few days after, I met Mr. Sambrook on a private foot-path, and he immediately mentioned the subject, and told me, that his late sister's husband, now a widower, had derived much comfort from the manner in which I had read the burial service. "I believe, Mr. Sambrook," I said, "that I always read it in the same manner; but perhaps, unconsciously on your account, I might have given it somewhat of an additional awe and solemnity. Your poor sister died suddenly; I have told you that I thought it probable your own end might be the same. This was in my mind, whilst I stood by the side of the grave, and saw you looking into it; and possibly it might have led me imperceptibly, to speak with a more serious and warning voice. God grant that it may have succeeded!"

He was quite at a loss what to say to this. He was affected in some way or other, which I could not explain; and at all events, he seemed to wish to escape from any further conversation.

But I was unwilling to lose so favorable an opportunity; and therefore I turned about, and offered to accompany him in the direction in which he was going. He could not refuse with any degree of civility; so we walked together; and that I might not appear to force the subject of religion upon him, in season, or out of season, I waited to take advantage of any thing which he might happen to say.

The funeral was still in his thoughts; and the first observation that he made was, that the description of the resurrection of the dead, which I had read to them in the lesson, was certainly very fine, but that he could not believe a word about the resurrection itself.

"Do you think it is not possible," I asked, "or not probable?"

"Neither the one," he answered, "nor the other."

"As to the possibility of the thing," I said, "your difficulty, I presume, arises from your knowing that the body, after death, is dissolved into dust, and in many cases scattered abroad in different places; and you cannot conceive how the particles can be brought together again, so as to preserve the identity; or, in plainer words, so as to be known to be the same body."

"That is it, exactly," said he.

I was very much relieved by this answer; for I was alarmed lest I might be led into an interminable discussion about the soul, in regard to which I was sure that he had none but the most vulgar ideas; and probably he had no clear ideas at all about the soul, as distinct from the body; and I did not see how we could ever arrive at any thing practical by that line of argument. I therefore proceeded at once to argue upon his own difficulty, and was very careful not to put any new one into his head.

"You have mentioned St. Paul," I said, "already, as a most distinguished preacher of the gospel. It seems, therefore, that you know something of his character. It was he who wrote the epistle from which the lesson is taken. Do you remember how he explains, or illustrates, the resurrection?"

"Yes," he replied; "by the sowing of the seed; but I could not comprehend it; in short, it seemed quite ridiculous."

We were walking at this moment through a field of wheat.

"If I am not mistaken," I said, "this is one of your fields."

He nodded assent.

"And perhaps you sowed this wheat yourself?"

He assented again.

"But it did not occur to you, it seems, that whilst you were sowing, you were in fact burying every single grain in its own little grave?"

"No, it did not," he said; "but it was certainly something very much like it."

"Very like indeed," I proceeded; "and therefore so far St. Paul was in the right. And the grains which you scattered about in the furrows were dead; were they not?"

"Why to be sure," he answered, "they might be called dead; as all the moisture, which they had in them whilst they were growing, seemed to be entirely dried up, and there was no appearance of life about them; they had become quite hard, and fit to be ground into flour."

"Well," I said; "and what became of them, when they were mixed with the soil and buried? Did they not begin to rot, as any human body might do?"

He granted it.

"Still, then, St. Paul is correct; but now comes the surprising change. When you might have expected the grains of seed to have rotted entirely away, and to disappear altogether, up sprung from them innumerable small green blades, apparently of grass; did there not?"

"There did," he answered.

"In fact," I said, "if you had examined those

seeds, whilst they were rotting in the ground, you would have found something in them most wonderful amongst all the wonderful things which surround us ; you would have found in each the rudiment, or principle, or whatever it may be called, of a new plant ; something, indeed, which had all the parts of a plant in miniature, and which only wanted the heat and moisture arising from the putrefaction of the rest of the seed to make it vegetate and grow ; have you observed this, or not ?”

“ I have often observed it,” he replied.

“ So then,” I said, “ the great Apostle might have thought of some similar principle in the decaying body of a man, which hereafter might shoot into life, and produce the new man.”

“ Yes,” said he, “ but we see nothing of this sort in the human body.”

“ Nor do we,” I rejoined, “ in the dry grain ; it appears afterwards, according to the law, which God himself has established. For, you may remember, in talking of the apple-tree, we were forced to impute every thing to the will and the wisdom of God ; and so we must in this case. Pray what lodged that little embryo plant in the body of the seed ? What made it sprout upwards and downwards, upwards into the green blade and downwards into the root ? Who put the em-

bryo plant into the right position to do this? And did not a stem afterwards issue out of the blade, and then an ear from the top of the stem, and lastly was not the ear filled with grains? Who planned all this, and ordained the means by which the plan was executed? You and I know nothing at all about it; no, nor the wisest philosopher. In many cases, in which we are ignorant, a person more skilled in the knowledge of nature than we are may be perfectly informed; so that it would be vastly foolish for us to say that such or such a thing cannot be believed, or cannot be, merely because we do not understand the how or the why of the thing; for others may understand it very well, and we ourselves may come to understand it hereafter. In this case, however, of the growth of the corn, we are all ignorant, both wise and simple; and we shall probably remain so. But what of that? The thing is as it is, and goes on nevertheless—Why? Because God is the author of it, and keeps the necessary causes in uninterrupted operation. Have you any thing to object to this?"

"I have not," he answered, "I see clearly that there must be a God, and I begin to admire his works."

"Go on and prosper," I said. "The more you know of them, the more you will admire



them; and the more, I hope, you will love and serve the Doer! But now tell me, is there any thing more wonderful, or more hard for God to do, in the resurrection of a dead body from the grave, than in the production of the wheat from the seed?"

"There is a great difference," he replied, "in the two things, after all."

"There may be a hundred differences," I rejoined; "but what of that? Does it follow, that of two things, one is possible, and the other impossible, because this other is not like the former in all respects, when God too is the worker?"

He could not say that.

"Well, then," I went on, "here is a thing, namely, the resurrection of the dead, of which we have yet no experience. St. Paul, indignant that any man should doubt it, when God had said that he would do it, tells the doubters that they might form some idea of it from the sowing of seed and the growing of the grain, which is equally inexplicable, but of which the fact is well known to us. Shall we quarrel with the apostle, because the two things cannot be exactly alike in all circumstances? But what are the circumstances that are unlike?"

"The new plant," he answered, "springs up from the seed, after a short period, before

the whole seed itself is turned into vegetable mould."

"Very well," I said; "but it did not suit the purposes of Providence, that there should be a resurrection of the dead soon after the burial of each corpse, but one simultaneous resurrection of all at the last day; on account of the general judgment of mankind, then to take place, and thereafter the everlasting separation of the good and the bad into Heaven and Hell."

He seemed to shudder at this thought; but he made no remark. I therefore proceeded—"To bring about a general resurrection at the moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the mighty sound of a trumpet piercing to the remotest corners of the universe; undoubtedly there must be causes at work with which we are unacquainted, or God himself may do it immediately by an especial act of power, when the appointed time is come. Either way there ought to be no difficulty to us, unless we think that God is neither all-wise, nor almighty. He, whose contrivances are so subtle and so complicated in thousands of natural things, may readily be supposed capable of this; and he, whose power was great enough to make man at the first, and is great enough to unmake him every day, in the midst of health and strength, may

readily be supposed capable of making him again after death. Is not this so?"

"These are wonderful things," he answered, "but I cannot contradict them. I wish, however, to know what will become of bodies which are scattered about in various distant places, and parts of which perhaps have passed into other substances!"

"Alas! alas! Mr. Sambrook," I said, "if you had but looked into your Bible now and then, you would have had more exalted ideas of God's power; so as not to stumble at such petty difficulties. He that said, let there be light, and there was light, cannot he order all the particles of a man's body, scattered wherever they may be; east, west, north, and south; on the tops of the highest mountains, and at the bottoms of the deepest oceans; to return in an instant of time to the rest of the mass, and to rebuild the former man! Certainly he can; he has only to will, and the thing is done. He cannot but know where every particle is, and no particle can be beyond the reach of his power. But perhaps nothing of this kind will be necessary; all, indeed, that is necessary is this; that after the resurrection we should be certain we are the same persons as before; and that is possible with a very great change of our bodies, as is proved in our passage from childhood to old

age; every particle is changed, again and again, and yet we are always conscious of our own identity. Let us have done then with cavils, Mr. Sambrook. It is God who has promised it, and he will not fail. This settles the question of probability at once. We should have known nothing about it, but for God's revelation. We might have hoped a little about the soul, that it would survive the shock of death; but the resurrection of the body, we should not have dreamed of. He has revealed it to us, and therefore it is not only possible and probable, but absolutely certain. God cannot lie. But we must always remember that there will be a resurrection, both of the just and of the unjust; and may he grant, for our Savior Jesus Christ's sake, that you and I may be amongst the just!"

I had walked as far as was convenient to me, when I spoke these last words; and it did not seem likely, if I continued the conversation, that I could have concluded with any thing more forcible. I turned, therefore, suddenly, and took my leave.

ABOUT two days after this conversation, as I was walking through my parish to visit the sick, Mr. Grange, whom I met frequently on the road, accosted me unusually, and inquired if I had heard the news.

"What news?" I said, "I have heard none."

"About Mr. Sambrook, Sir. He is dead!" replied Mr. Grange.

"Mr. Sambrook dead!" I exclaimed, with a mixture of surprise and terror. "God forbid, Sir! I should fear he was scarcely prepared to die; but God knows best when it is fit, in the exercise of his government of the world, to inflict the blow of death!"

"Be that as it may, Sir," said he, "Mr. Sambrook is certainly dead. And now I see that it will give you still greater pain to hear the manner of his death. He used to be your enemy, Sir; and there are too many who would be glad of the misfortunes of an enemy; which you, I perceive, are not."

I was, indeed, very much shocked, and betrayed my inward feelings by my outward manner. At the same time, I was eager to know more; I desired, and yet feared to be told the rest. A thousand ideas darted through my head, like lightning; but that something tragical was to be told, I had no doubt whatever.

"He was thrown, Sir," said Mr. Grange, "last night from his chaise, and killed upon the spot."

"What?" I said, "without any preparation? Not a moment spared to ask God to pardon him?"

"I am told, Sir," he replied, "that the unfortunate man scarcely breathed when he was found, which was immediately after the accident."

"Let us all take warning, Mr. Grange," I said, and passed on hastily; for I was deeply affected, and wanted a short time for silent meditation, on the judgments of the Almighty disposer of all events.

In the course of my walk, I was informed by various persons of all the particulars of Mr. Sambrook's death. It seems that he had been drinking at a tavern; and, either from natural good-humor, or stimulated by liquor, had undertaken to convey some people, whom he met there, in his chaise to the neighboring parish. Having done this, and having probably drunk something more there, and again on his return to another tavern, he was so far heated as to contend for the lead on a narrow road, with another chaise of the same description as his own. The wheels of the two chaises came in contact with each other; he was thrown forward with violence, in consequence of the sudden stop; he fell upon his head; his neck was dislocated; and his death was instantaneous.

My anxiety about him led me to inquire what had been his habits since I began first to converse with him. I think I ascertained that he had been much less frequently at the public-houses;



but nobody assigned any other cause of this apparent amendment than the increasing want of money. Whether he was amended in any other respects after his mind had been in some measure enlightened, I cannot tell. On the fatal day of his death, he was evidently intoxicated; or a man of his age would never have engaged in so childish and dangerous a contest. As to church, he had never been there, except at his sister's funeral; although I had expected it of him, as the proof of his intention to begin a new life.

His death, owing to the awful circumstances of it, and the idea which had got abroad that he had despised my warning voice, produced a great sensation in the parish. At the funeral there was an immense concourse of people. The distress of the widow and daughters seemed to be beyond all measure. The daughters fainted again and again; the widow was supported by two of her sons, and made several attempts to throw herself into the grave. The church-yard resounded with their cries. This at first astonished me. If these persons had been brought up in religious habits, or were likely to be touched with religious feelings, the scene before them was undoubtedly most affecting and most terrible. A husband, a father, having persisted to the last in a vicious course, and in the utter neglect of his Maker and Re-

deemer, in spite of the instructions and admonitions of his minister, was now hurled on the sudden by avenging justice, as it might reasonably be feared, into a bitter eternity. But the case with these persons was apparently the reverse, and must be explained in a different manner. And a circumstance, which came soon afterwards to my knowledge, did, I think, sufficiently explain it. Much noise and tumult was heard within the poor man's premises during the whole evening of the funeral; such as is the consequence of intoxication; and it is more than probable that those who attended the funeral were excited by the force of liquor to that exhibition of excessive grief, with which the sober-minded were shocked and disgusted.

I had an opportunity of discovering afterwards, that the sons and daughters had a very inadequate feeling of their father's calamity. They came to me three or four times about the settlement of his debt, which, at length, was finally discharged. At first I feared to wound them to the quick by mentioning his dreadful end; but I soon found that there was no occasion for any delicacy. They were manifestly very little moved by it. However, one or two of them came to church at intervals, in consequence of what I then said to them. The widow, whom I have not been able to see, came once only.

One lesson is to be learned from this sad history, that in attempting to save the souls of men, we must not relax our efforts on the vain notion that we shall have plenty of time because our patient is strong and healthy. Death interposes, and destroys the calculations and the patient together.

THE END.

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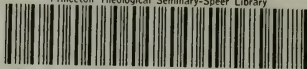








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